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I have been wanting to write about the past of my family and eventually that of my husband's for the longest time. A sort of "Roots" for my children and grandchildren because if I don't. all past would be lost. There is no one else to do it. What relatives I have left are either quite a bit older than I am or are sick or both. Come to think of it, up to the ages of ten and seven respectively, my children didn't know one single relative. Not grandparents, not cousins, aunts, uncles, none. Only after emigrating did they get to meet cousins, uncles and aunts, most of them on my husband's side. I hope to be able to bring the story up to the present, the events as they unfolded and which ultimately brought us to these shores. A lot of it will be my own story as what I am writing will be the events as I perceived them -a teenager of barely fifteen years - as I felt them and related to them. It occurs to me that were I required to give a title to this narrative I could name it "From nowhere to America", but, that would tell only part of the story. The other part, the torturous road we travelled - literally and figuratively - I doubt that it is in my power to even come close to conveying an accurate picture. Or, I could title it "A Life Interrupted" take your pick!

After twentyone years of work in a Manhattan office, at age fiftyeight I took early retirement. After two years in retirement, on April 24, 1990, I finally sat down with a pen and notebook and started this memoir. I didn't have to think in what language I should write. I always liked the English language, ever since I became aware of it and eventually it became my primary language. That is not to say that I know it well, I have studied it only for a short period of time, there is a lot of room for improvement, but I will try my best.

For the longest time after liberation I refused to let the past intrude, I refused to think of it! It wasn't a conscious decision on my part, I simply wouldn't let myself. Sometimes I used to ask myself: "What kind of monster are you, how can you go on as if nothing had happened?" There was no answer, only guilt. Years later I came to understand that that had been for me the only way I could cope, the only way I could go on. It was the mechanism of survival at work in its own mysterious way.

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Unfortunately, that repression ofthe memories of my former life was not without consequences. When the time arrived and I was ready to resurrect them I found that I had almost lost them. I couldn't see clearly the faces of my mother and sisters, they were vague and blury, I was unable to describe them. That hurt, it was like losing them once again. I would give anything to get a picture of them, but all the relatives who would have been likely to have photographs have also perished without trace. I do have a picture of my father, someone had found it among a bunch of others on some bulletin board after the war. It was a small black and white picture, like a passport picture, in a hat, dark suit, white shirt and tie, looking about thirty years old. I had enlarged it and gave copies to the kids.

I was saying that I was writing my memories for the children and grandchildren, but perhaps, to some extent I am also doing it for myself. I want to remember, to recall the details once more, remember the childish joys of the past. And hopefully, at the end of it I will feel a little better knowing I have done my duty, my obligation towards my family and the million others who perished, the obligation no to forget them.

I was born in a small village in Northern Transylvania, Romania. This village had three different names, depending in what language one was talking. In Romanian it was called "Repedea", In Hungarian it was "Oroszko" and in Yiddish we called it "Krivei". The name of the region was "Judetul Maramures, the largest city in the region was "Sighet", the birthplace of Elie Wiesel..I think that more than anyone or anything else, Elie Wiesel put Sighet on the map.

Transylvania is being claimed by both the Romanians and Hungarians and at times in the past it was ruled by either one or the other for certain periods of time. When my parents were children they went to Hungarian schools and my mother never learned to speak well Romanian after the regime changed. We called our parents "Anyu" and "Apu" for Mother and Father, but we kids didn't speak Hungarian.

When I was a child I used to think that Krivei was at the end of the world. We were surrounded by very high mountains, they seemed to melt into the sky, becoming part of it and when I grew a little older I remember wondering what lay on the other side. Three kilometers down the road there was another, larger village called "Poienile de sub Munte" (The Valley Bellow the Mountain"), the mountain the name refers to was also the border with the Ukraine or rather, Russia. So, if we were not exactly "at the end of the world" we were at the end of something, sort of.

In my mind's eye I can still see clearly the layout of the village, every Jewish house, every store, the orchards, the river and the bridge across connecting the two sides. It was a place similar to countless others in the region. Jews were a small minority, they worked hard and mostly struggled, just one step above the poverty level. They were the storekeepers, taylors, cobblers, and a few here and there living off the land. The rest of the population was spread out all around, in the hills and valleys. They were Ruthenians (of Slavic origin), they spoke their own language (similar to Ucrainian) wore different type of clothing. We all knew how to speak their language, but Romanian was the official language. They were mostly farmers, shepherds - some owned large flocks of sheep and cattle. During the summer the cattle and sheep would be herded up the mountains for grazing and on quiet summer evenings sometimes one could hear the melancholy sounds of the Romanian Doinas played by the shepherds flutes and brought down to the village by the wind. Others were employed cutting timber in the forests for certain companies. I have a vague memory of huge logs made into rafts going down the river, directed by a couple of men. I don't know how far or to where these rafts went. There was a saw mill in the village where they cut timber into different dimensions. There was a huge lumberyard and we kids liked to play there, building houses.

As far as I know, my father was born in 1905 and my mother in 1909. It was said that my father received one hundred thousand lei as a dowry, a very large sum in those days. The family legend also has it that my father was called up for military service just before the wedding and grandpa Appel redeemed him by supplying the military with a horse, fully equiped with everything that went with it.

My father's name was Mordechai Eliezer Cremer (or Kremer in Hungarian). In Yiddish he was called "Martchaleizer, a contraction of both names. Actually, his father's last name was Gancz and grandma's name was Cremer. That happened often in the old days when Jewish people only married by a rabbi, a "church wedding" so to speak and didn't find it important to have a civil marriage. The same thing happened with my husband Steven (Sruli) Fogel, his mother was Fogel and his father Stern. (Without a civil marriage the kids were considered bastards by the civil authorities and named after the mother.) I have just realized - as I am writing this - that my mother's name was Ella Malek (Feiga Leah in Yiddish) but her father - grandfather Ydel was an Appel and grandma Rachel was Malek...However, my aunts, the younger generation went already by their father's name. This situation would sometimes create real complications.

Officially, in Romanian, my father's name was Cremer Martin. He was the secretary of the "Primarie" sort of a Town Hall, a job he had inherited from his father Favish Gancz upon his death at age 63 of some kind of illness. I don't recall what other employees worked there, but I know that my father managed everything, all the affairs of the village. The mayor's job was mostly ceremonnial. During the Hungarian occupation of Transylvania when Jews were prohibited from holding public office, my father stayed on the job, unofficially, up untill he was called up to forced labor.

There were many things I didn't know about my father and his family, or had forgotten. When my aunt Fradel came to visit from Israel I had a chance to talk to her and she was able to fill in many gaps for me. Fradel - we used to call her "Fritzi" - is my father's sister and she is about 15 years older than I am so she remembers much more than I do.

According to Fradel, my father was educated at a Yeshiva in Cluj (Kolozsvar in Hungarian) a nice size city in Transylvania. I have no idea where he got his secular education. Aside from his secretarial job he also had a part time job as an accountant for the owners of the saw mill. He was a quiet, gentle man, very, very bright. Fradel said that he was a champion chess player, but I don't remember seeing him playing chess, I remember him always reading. Newspapers, magazines, even novels. Or some Hebrew volume. Boys and young men home from Yeshivoth on vacation would come to

our house on Shabbos afternoons and learn with my father. For the young boys this was some sort of a test, in Yiddish it was called "Oishern". I guess their parents wanted to know how far the boys progressed, get an honest evaluation, but this is just a guess. To this day, when I listen to the chant of this learning tears come to my eyes. This is a unique melody and to me it evokes the lazy summer, Shabbos afternoons when I was at peace, reading, with the voices of the pupil and by my father in the background.

As almost all men in the village, my father was a deeply religious man, strict in all observance, yet he let me read anything I pleased. I think I have inherited my love of reading from him. True, there was no danger of reading anything inappropriate for a kid since there was no library in the village or abundance of books to choose from, books were passed on from hand to hand. Out of necessity, I read books way above my level of comprehension. Many times I would read some of the same books my father read, one title I can remember was Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment". Once, while rummaging in my babe Beila's attic I came across a torn volume of plays by Shakespeare. I must have been 10-11 years old. It was in Romanian translation. Starved for reading material, I read those plays from cover to cover: "Macbeth", "King Lear" Romeo and Juliet", these I remember, I don't remember what other plays were in there. But they affected me strongly, they became rooted in my mind and to this day I remember a couple of lines from Macbeth. My father used to bring me children's magazines whenever he travelled to Sighet. In spite of this shortage of books I managed to read most of the great children'fairy tales, by the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, also Jules Verne, etc.

My mother liked to read what we called in those days "Cowboy books", little booklets, romances about the American West. They were in Hungarian and also travelled from house to house. Ihave no idea where they came from, it seems strange to me now that the ladies would read this kind of books, but then again, perhaps these booklets were survivors of the old Hungarian regime , that was the language they knew, and like me, they didn't have much to choose from.

I can recall my early childhood, living in a rented apartment -I must have been 5-6 years old. Our house was in the process of being built, on a large plot in the center of the village..My parents had some kind of arrangement with the director of the saw mill whereby they would build the house (It was built of timber, like 99% of the houses in the village)and they would live in it for a certain amount of years. My parents supplied the land. Timber, of course was no problem for the director so they built a large, pretty house (by those standards) with an L-shaped verandah surrounding it on two sides. I think I was eight years old when the director sort of suddenly moved away and my family moved in. There were three bedrooms, a large kitchen where we had our meals, a pantry my mother would stock with preserves she had prepared during the summer. There was another small room built on the side near the stairs leading to the garden. That later became the servant girl's room. The house had an unusual feature for those times and place in that it had the toilett at the end of the verandah where it bordered the garden, not an outhouse in the yard like all the others. From the kitchen side of the house you looked out to a big stretch of land, all the way ro the river.

Down the road, two houses away there lived my father's a half-brother , uncle Shloime with aunt Tila and three kids, Fritzi, Favi and Toby. Fritzi was one year older than I. Of their family no one survived. Toward the end of my stay in Auschwitz I had found out that Fritzi was in the same camp I was in, in bloc 21 or 22 and I had an opportunity to go see her. Her bloc was in much worse shape than mine, there were no bunks, the people were lying on the floor on some straw covering themselves with filthy blankets. I found Fritzi emaciated, a "musulman" (in camp lingo), barely able to talk, half-dead already, and she knew it. Had I known earlier that she was there, my aunt and I might have been able to take her to our bloc, to be close to us and she might have survived. In those circumstances, one desperately needed a friendly face, preferably from one's former life, someone to share the misery with, to support each other and help each other. But, in the stage Fritzi was in it was already too late. I remember that a year or so later, living with one of my aunts in Targu-Mures she sort of repproached me that I haven't tried to save Fritzi. My aunt Rifka (half-sister of my father's) had lived in Romania proper, and had not been deported. It was hard for her to understand as

it is hard even today for most people to comprehend the enormity of such evil.

Further down the road, right after uncle Shloime's house was my grandma Beila's house and behind the house an orchard and behind it a large field with different crops . At the end of the field ran the river. Our land and grandma's joined close to the river and in the summer we kids would cross over to her side to bathe, that part of the river was flowing more gently.

In the front of the house on the kitchen side there was a vegetable garden where my mother had planted a variety of vegetables, enough to last us through the summer and much of the winter. It was all stocked in the cellar including apples which would last until Passover. Part of the land was planted with young fruit trees, not yet producing fruit. Some Jewish families had a stable with a cow or two, including my grandma Beila. We were not rich by any means, but we lived comfortably.

The population at large was mostly illiterate. That was the time when a "towncrier" was employed to beat the drum in order to gather the people to deliver some new rule or regulation in the Ruthenian language. Everybody spoke Ruthenian and so did we kids. I have forgotten it since, but hard pressed I could still dig up a few frazes.

When the villagers did business, buying or selling a piece of land, a house, a horse or a cow, etc., there was a contract to be made which in most cases my father did for them often without payment. He never tried to take advantage of their ignorance, people liked him and held him in great esteem. Some of them tried to show their appreciation sometimes by bringing to the house some fruit or eggs, wild strawberries, hazelnuts, etc. Some people in his position in the neighboring towns built themselves mini-mansions.

I went back to my birthplace after the war only once, about two years after liberation. I almost didn't recognize the

place. Some of the Jewish houses were completely missing from the main street, I don't know if they were destroyed or the locals had pulled them apart and carried away everything, I never asked. Instead of the houses what I could see were trees, it looked as if the forest has moved into the village ready to swallow it as a way of punishment.

I found our house also delapidated, in disrepair, boards broken or missing in the outside verandah, the yard neglected, in two or three and a half short years the house too was like in mourning. My half-uncle Hersh Leib had sold our house - to the Town Hall - that is, it became the Town Hall.(Isn't there a certain irony here!) My uncle was my legal guardian as I was still underage. I had come to get some documents (like a birth certificate) from the Town Hall. The only trace of my family ever having lived there were two "shifoniers" (wardrobes or closets) which used to be in one of the bedrooms, for cloth and linen. Now they held files. Had I had a home somewhere I would have certainly reclaimed them. They were the only tangible objects to survive from all our posessions. But, perhaps it is healthier for me without that constant reminder!

, The money I had received from the sale of the house was converted for me by my uncle into dollars on the black market and he held it for me. Inflation was rampant, the Romanian "lei" had practically no value, my uncle didn't get many dollars. Thru the following few years every now and then my uncle would change a few dollars back into lei - as I needed - and by the time I was eighteen and had finished the Beth Jacob seminary the money was gone. By then I had a job as a "Mora Umadricha" (teacher and leader) on a Beth Jacob kibbutz in Sighet (it was really a combination of kibbutz and orphanage) I had a room for myself on the kibbutz grounds, food from the common kitchen and a small salary.

I have never known my father's father, Gancz Favish. His first wife died leaving him with five young kids: Henia, Rifka, Hersh Leib, Aizik and Shloime. The second wife - my grandma Beila - had another six kids: my father, Gicza, Duvid, Kalman, Fradel and Rozsi. Hersh-Leib survived forced labor, but his wife and two kids perished in Auschwitz. My aunt Rivka survived together with her husband Pollak Mottel who was a shochet - I

think they lived in Vatra-Dornei, Romania. Of the rest of the eleven kids only Fradel and Rozsi survived, both still alive at this writing, the only ones. By the way, they live in Israel. My grandma raised them all as her veryown and they remained close to the very end. By the time I became aware of these family relationships, aunt Henia had married Idel Sthroli and lived in Sighet as did uncle Hersh-Leib. Aizik and Gicza had also married and lived in Viseul de Sus , uncle Shloime lived in the neighborhood and only Kalman, Duvid and Rozsi were still single, living with grandma. Fritzi - or Fradel - was also single, but was living in Sighet with aunt Henia. She had a job at the sweater factory in town. That is basically all I know about my father's family. I don't know where they came from, how long they had lived in the area, etc. I would have loved to know many more details.

I remember my babe Beila as a short energetic woman, her back a little bent, perhaps by age, perhaps by osteoporosis. She didn't wear a "Sheitel" (wig) as was the fashion, but kept her head always covered by a kerchief. Most women in the village wore their sheitels only on Shabbosz, Holidays or other special occasions. My father was clean-shaven, but my mother too wore a wig only on special occasions, but resented it very much. I once overheard her telling my father: "It doesn't make sense to me that girls have to sacrifice their hair as soon as they marry.If we are commanded to be fruitful and multiply shouldn't women try to stay attractive?" My mother got around the custom by keeping "forhur", a bunch of hair in the front which can be combed over the wig or let show a tiny bit under the kerchief, much like some bald men try to hide their baldness. My father never argued with my mother - or at least I have never heard them arguing which amounts to the same since it would have been unavoidable not to hear it - and for a long time I thought that that was the norm for marriages.

My grandma didn't have any income except for what she received from the sale of the fruit in her orchard She grew a wide variety of apples, Jonathan apples, Gold apples, Wine-apples, Shemesh apples, someof them unknown in these parts. The fruit merchants would come in the spring while the trees were only blooming, assess how much the trees are likely to

produce and put down a deposit. They would return in late fall, hire people to handpick the apples, crate them and ship them I don't know where to. The Jonathan apples from our region were especially famous, it was said that the climate was very favorable for the fruits in our parts. But sometimes a late freeze would destroy the bloom or other natural disaster and then things weren't too good. At such times the married children would pitch in, especially aunt Henia. Her husband Shtroli was a well-to-do merchant, he owned warehouses of flour and was always ready to help. I once asked Fradel how my grandma managed to give all the boys a Yeshiva education. Fradel said that the boys were all very bright and supposedly some rabbi told uncle Shtroli that "a mind is a terrible thing to waste!", so he helped with their education. I found that interesting because when I worked at Coolidge - which is a Direct Mail Advertising company - I handled the United Negro College Fund account among others and the quote about the wasting of a mind was their motto, on top of some of their stationary.

When I think of my grandma Beila I see her most often standing by the kitchen window overlooking the orchard, davening, praying. She used the "Tzena-U-Rena, a prayer book translated into Yiddish. I remember how on Tisha-be-Av my family and uncle Shloime's - the women and kids - would gather at grandma's house, she would spread a couple of blankets on the floor and she would read the story of the destruction of the Temple In Jerusalem and she would cry and then we would also cry, it was such a sad story. Babe Beila was very smart, she was asked for advise in different areas, she was called to the sick, to weddings and to problem childbirth, in times of trouble and in times of joy, she was always there to help. I named Ruthy "Beila Ratza" after my grandma Beila and my sister Raczi and she has all the good traits of her namesake-may Hashem grant her long life.

On my mother's side there were also many aunts and uncles. My grandfather's name was Yidel (Iuda) Appel. He was short and slim with a longish beard, always very neat and always buried in some volume of the Talmud. My grandmother Rachel I remember as a tall, good-looking woman, on the heavy side, always busy cooking or baking. They lived in the neighboring village

of Ruscova, a few kilometers away from us. They had three boys and seven daughters. They were, in order of age: Hershy, Wlvi, Feiga-Leah (my mother), Miriam, Blima, the twins Reizi and Suri, Motti, Ruchel and Raczi. Hershy died at about age twenty of some illness, Wolvi, Miriam and Blima married before deportation (as well as my mother), they had small kids and perished in Auschwitz. My aunts Reizi, Suri, Ruchel and Raczi and uncle Motti survived the camps.

My aunts were relatively young girls and I used to love to visit during summer vacations, but I wouldn't last longer than a week or ten days. I would get homesick and I would be put on a "fiakker" a carriage or -later on - on the bus for the few km. ride home.

Yuda Appel was a respected man in the community, a "Talmid Chacham" a learned person and was relatively well off. He owned a store - as was the custom - in the house where they lived, they sold fabrics and peasant attire and a lot of the time my aunts took care of the store. They also owned a few parcels of land. My grandfather was very strict and forbade the girls to read novels which he considered frivolous and a waste of time, but they read them anyway.

I only very vaguely remember my great-grandfather Mendel-Srul Malek on my Grandma Rachel's side, an old, tall man with a long, gray beard and also my grandma's brother Leizer Malek whose three kids, Moishe, Feigi and Meite live in Israel. Most of grandma's family lived in Ruscova, grandpa Idel's family lived in Ieud, another small town in the region. My grandpa had a few brothers and some of the offspring survived the camps, some settled in Israel and some live in Boro Park or elsewhere in the U.S.

Life for us children was pretty good and most importantly, it felt safe. During the long winters, after school and home-work we went sledding and if we were lucky we would catch a ride in a real sled drawn by horses. No one owned ice skates - they must have been unaffordable for parents - boys would sometime cobble together some wooden skates and learn to use them. The snow sometimes didn't start to melt until Passover, the cold

was biting, but there wasn't much wind, being surrounded by the high mountains, we were protected. Summer was delightful. We would go bathing in the river or wander through the fields and orchards in packs, pick fruit in season from the trees or fallen fruit from under and eat it right then and there, noone thought of washing it. Or we gathered in somebody's large yard and played hide-and-seek or formed circles and danced and sang, "Ring around the Rosy" and similar children's games that seem to be universal. When we were a little older we ventured walking into the forest, we did that mostly on Shabbos. Sometimes we would spy on the older boys and girs walking way ahead of us and they would get angry and chase after us. There was a clearing further into the forest where there were the ruins of a concrete building that was said to have been Roman ruins. It seemed a mysterious and interesting place to us. Going further into the forest, uphill on a winding dirt road you reached a place where there was a spring of hot, mineral water with an awful smell, there was a primitive bathing facility there - the place was called "Scorodne"-and supposedly, it helped alleviate the pains of arthritis sufferers. The villagers, including many Jewish ladies, went to take baths there in the summer. They rented a room for a couple of weeks in a peasant's cottage, food could be brought up occasionally by a family members and if nothing else, the fresh mountain air, the peace and tranquility, the rest, certainly helped them feel better.

Thinking back, it seems sort of an idyllic kind of life. There was no electricity, (except in the sawmill) no telephones and, to my knowledge, not even radios. For any kind of urgent or important message, people sent telegrams. The Community took care of it's poor and we, kids, formed friendships with complete disregard of wealth or status. I was expected to do well in school and I did, but I will never forget the first day of school. I was terrified, was screaming and crying, my mother had to literally drag me to the school. After that I was all right. All through grade school I was sitting on a bench with my best friend Pollac Malcsi and we were friendly competitors for the top honors.

I can't say that I have experienced much anti-semitism as a kid. Sometimes, on Sundays, after celebrating the Holy day in the local tavern, a peasant would let loose with some expletive and show his feelings by yelling" "Jew, go to Palestine!". It seems that it was taken for granted by these people that Jews belonged to Palestine. It is ironic that after we did get it, not many thought so any more. However, I do remember one instance when there were rumors of a pogrom. It was during the reign of Cuza Voda. We locked ourselves in the houses that were kept dark and I remember my father staying at the window that whole night, behind the curtain, lifting a corner of the curtain every once in a while. From that window we could see a long stretch of the street. I don't know what good being locked up in the house would have done to us, but obviously, there was nowhere else to hide.

That night, the reign of Cuza and his legionnaires -rabid fascists - collapsed. We found out in the morning about this development and we gathered in the Shul to give thanks to G-d. It was indeed a miracle!

As I mentioned earlier, what I am recounting here are the events as I remember them. Some dates may not be accurate to the day or even month, but I am not going to do research and likewise I cannot give much thought to proper grammar or construction of sentence. I don't have the education for it, but mainly I don't want the flow of writing to be intrerupted, my memories come gushing as if afraid to be left out.

I was the oldest of four sisters. Raczi was the second oldest Then there was Suri and Giczu, at age seven, the youngest. In Romanian they were named Rozalia, Sara and Ghizella. I was called Heniu in Yiddish, Helena in Romanian. When I received my citizenship I dropped the "a" at the end of my name to become plain Helen. I thought that would make it more "American sounding". We were so eager to blend in, to fit in!

I am procrastinating, sidetracking, I dread to get closer to describing the fateful events that all of a sudden turned my life upside down, deprived me of a family, home, relatives, friends, made me an orphan.

As I was growing older it became more and more difficult for me read or watch Holocaust related events. Sometimes I cannot believe that it was me who experienced those events, it almost seems that it happened to another person. I still very seldom talk about it to others especially non-Jews. But, nowadays when we get together - fellow survivors - we do talk about it, we tell bits and pieces of our experiences, each of us had lived through different ones. There were so many "lagers" camps, the smaller ones are hardly known. The historians have done a pretty good job of documenting our history and some actually may have experienced it, but because the individual experiences were so varied I am not sure it is possible to capture it all. In any case, I firmly believe that no person who hasn't himself lived through day-by-day the life of a concentration camp inmate is capable of conveying that kind of life. And I was one of the more lucky ones compared to some others!

For us it all started in 1940 -fall of 1940 to be more accurate, when Hitler forced Romania to relinquish Transylvania to Hungary. I remember the Hungarian troops entering the village, crossing the bridge and the population lined up on the sides with Hungarian flags. I think it was my father who taught the kids of the village the Hungarian national anthem "Isten ald meg a Magyart" (G-d bless the Maghiars) and we sang it to the troops even though none of us knew the language.

I was a six grader that fall when we started learning the Hungarian language in school, but by 1942 it was forbidden to Jewish kids to go to school. Our parents bribed officials and kids were able to continue, unofficially. All kinds of anti-semitic laws were promulgated including the wearing of the yellow star. Soon after, they started calling up all Jewish men - except the very young or very old -who were sent to the forced labor camps. And so of course, was my father.

I have retained a vivid image of my father as he walked out the kitchen door into a dark, rainy night. He had hired a carriage to take him to the neighboring village - I am not sure why - perhaps that was the place of departure for the labor camps. I have this picture of him in my mind, in a hat and coat crossing the treshhold, my mother just sitting there, looking at him, not

saying anything, all the goodbyes exhausted.

For a while we kept receiving postcards from him from somewhere in Hungary. They didn't say much, but at least we knew he was alive. Then the cards stopped coming. After some time, my mother was advised to send inquiries to the Red Cross and after many months we received an answer in the form of a telegram.

It was a late Friday afternoon, my mother was just preparing to light the Shabbos candles when the telegram arrived. I was outside on the verandah when I heard screaming. I ran into the house and saw my mother on the floor, she had passed out. I ran down the street to my grandma Beila and brought her over. I hadn't read the telegram. By the time I returned with my grandma, my mother had come to and now there were two of them crying and wailing. What the telegram said was that my father "eltunt" is missing. But we knew that was just a euphemism, there was little chance of him being alive. In spite of it, all through the concentration camps I nursed a very thin hope that perhaps he was alive somewhere and I'll find him when all the horror was over. I found out much later, after liberation, from a guy from Ruscova who was in the same labor uunit as my father that he had died in the collapse of a coal mine somewhere in Hungary.

At this point my personal life changed drastically, I had to grow up all of a sudden. My mother took the death of my father very much to heart and became sick with migraine headaches and other ailments. We had to let the servant girl go and I had to help out with everything, getting my sisters to school, supervise homework, help with cooking, baking, etc. Only for heavy work, cleaning or laundry did we engage a woman. We rented out one of the bedrooms for an office for a Hungarian forestry company from Budapest and the next bedroom became the living quarter for the official. This part of the house had a separate entrance so it was convenient for everyone.

I didn't return to school the semester of winter 1943-44 - which turned out to be the last semester of schooling for Jewish kids all over Transylvania. Instead, I learned how to bake bread in a real oven heated by coals from firewood and assorted

other household tasks. My mother travelled to Targu Mures - another city i n Transylvania, with a University and a good reputation in the medical field. She stayed with her brother Walvi for some time and consulted with doctors, but there is no treatment for heartbreak, only time, and we were running out of it.

There was an atmosphere of fear in the village, but to my knowledge no one knew of the tragedy of the German and Polish Jews who, by that time had been for years in concentration camps. I recall that once in a while some Jewish men would come through the village, sort of furtively, trying to reach the border with Russia. I also vaguely recall some stories of Jews being slaughtered in Galicia, I don't know if anyone took them seriously. We were a bunch of women and children mostly, unsophisticated,plain people as can be, intent on survival day by day.

Some months before our deportation a battalion (I'm not sure that's the word) of Jewish men - a forced labor unit - settled in our village. From them we found out a little more about what was happening to Jews in other places, about leaders of Jewish communities being arrested and never heard of again, about mass murders in Galicia, but even they didn't know - or didn't want to tell us about wholesale deportations.

The last Passover at home - in April 1944 - we had invited two young guys from the forced labor unit to the Seder. I believe most of them were placed with some family for the Seder. It was a relatively pleasant Seder, it was nice to have a man to conduct it. The last day of Pesach, the company of Jewish men received the sudden order to pack up and leave. It was done in such a hurry there was no time for any goodbyes. Within one or two hours they were gone. The next morning we started on the road to Auschwitz. I had just turned fifteen that April, 1944.

4/26/90

The morning after Pesach my mother started baking bread. The dough was left to rise, the oven was being heated and I was cleaning our only bedroom (the kitchen also served as a bedroom)

when I looked out into the street. On the other side of the street, a couple of houses down the road I noticed a carriage stopping in front of the Town Hall. A couple of Hungarian "Csendor" policeman got off and went into the Town Hall. I remarked on it to my mother since it was a little unusual strange policemen coming to town. My mother didn't seem concerned, our village didn't have a police station, in some areas wewere lumped together with neighboring Poieni. "They are probably from the neighboring station" my mother said, "they have legitimate business in our area". In our most terrifying nightmares we couldn't have dreamed what was to follow.

An hour or so later the drumbeat was heard and after the gathering of a large enough group of people the town crier announced that all Jewish men, women and children, healthy or ill, young or old have to gather at the synagogue within a few hours of the announcement. They should take along only as much as they could carry by hand - food for three days and clothing.

We were bewildered, stunned, we had not the slightest inkling what it all meant. As there was no telephone no way to contact anybody, my mother decided that I should walk to Ruscova, to her parents house and find out what the situation was there, get some adwise about what to do from her father, who being an old man hadn't been drafted.

As I had mentioned earlier, there was a saw mill in the village that had railroad tracks leading to Ruscova and from there to Leordina (another village) where it could make the connection to a regular freight train. "I think it's a shorter way going along the tracks and besides, you won't meet people" my mother said. I was used to walking long distances. The previous years grades 5-7 had been sent to the school in the neighboring village of Poienile de sub Munte and combined the classes - perhaps for financial reasons - and we would walk every morning the three Km. there and another three in the afternoon no matter what the weather was. The whole group walked together, that made it a little less unpleasant. But walking by myself about double that distance one way that wasn't something to look forward to.

There was a little train carrying the lumber - a freight train - it didn't run on a regular basis and as I walked alongside the tracks, or on the tracks, I don't remember meeting or seeing any people. It was an unnamed terror that drove me, my mother impressed on me the need to walk as fast as possible, because I needed to get back on time for the assembly in the Shul.

I arrived at my grandparents' home without incident and what I found there was the same situation as I had left behind. I was given the message that there was nothing to be done, but to comply. It is rather strange that I have no recollection of how I got home. Did I walk or did my grandparents find a carriage, a peasant with a cart to take me back? I would think it was the latter, Aside from the fact that I must have been tired there was the need to get back in time.

I don't recall whether my mother had time to bake the bread. She gathered a few things she valued - chiefly the silver candelabra - and gave them for safekeeping to the man who was renting part of our house. (Memory is a strange thing. All these years I couldn't remember his name, now as I am writing this it struck me all of a sudden. His name was Szasz, a common Hungarian name.) He seemed a decent enough person, we had known him for about two years and I guess, my mother trusted him. However, as it turned out that wasn't such a great idea. He was a stranger and eventually went back where he came from taking along all or most of our possessions. Had she left the things with someone from the locals perhaps they would have been returned to me. It would have been nice to have something - anything - from my family to carry along with me. But there really wasn't much time to think things through and I think that deep down most of us thought that this was just some temporary measure that in a few days, a week, we would return to our homes.

Eventually, everybody was gathered in the Shul and in the Shulyard, except for a few old men, we were a bunch of women and children. The atmosphere was somber, a gloom had descended on us, but strangely enough, I don't remember any loud crying, people kept their fears in check, perhaps they didn't want to freighten the kids.

We were held in the Shul and shulyard for a few days, each of us - or rather each family was prepared with as much food as was possible and water we could still get from some well and we stoically suffered the hardships and indignities, the cramped space, the lack of sanitary facilities for so many people, etc. After a few days, we were loaded on the little freight train like so much lumber and shipped to Viseul de Sus, the second largest town in the region. Part of the town was cordonned off and made into a ghetto. Here they assembled all Jews from the neighboring villages, piling a few families in houses with a room and a kitchen, or worse.

We shared the place assigned to us with four other families: my grandma Beila with my father's youngest sister Rozsi, my aunt Tilla and her three kids, my aunt Gicza and her little girl and the owner of the house with her four kids - I believe the owner was a distant relative. We had some food that we had brought from home and in spite of the Hungarian police that was guarding the ghetto some of the townspeople would find a way to come closeby and barter foodstuff for money, jewelry or anything of value. I remember cooking sometimes in the backyard in an old, primitive fashion. My mother put me in charge of my three sisters, wanted me to keep them occupied. By that time, my sister Raczi was about twelve, Suri was nine and Ghicza was seven - she was just at the age when she should have started grade school. Each of them looked differently and were of different temperament. I, at fifteen was quite a chubby girl with a round face, dirtyblond hair and short in stature. I was very quiet and very shy. Raczi on the contrary (as were all my sisters) was skinny, a readhead, fearless and outgoing and with fiery temper. Didn't care much about school or books. She was the one who would volunteer to deliver messages if needed, go places where I , as the oldest should have. Suri, I remember as a pretty kid with brown hair, a sweet temper and good student. The youngest - we called her Ghiczala - was blonde, resembling my mother. That is about all I remember about my sisters, as I said before, I had suppressed the memories of my earlier life and to a lesser extent the memories of camplife.

I had acquired a certain fatalism - what will be, will be - but as I grew older I came to think that someday I'll have to unburden myself and I felt more and more strongly about it as more and more revisionist literature kept cropping up. It made me absolutely furious to read that already, in our lifetime someone has the audacity to say that it was all a hoax! So,for what it's worth, I'll add my voice to the countless others' who didn't let their memories die with them, one more witness to one of the most heinous crime case in history.

We were kept in the ghetto for about four-five weeks before the deportations started. The first transport of families was taken to the local train station, piled into cattle cars and sent off to Auschwitz. My family - including everyone in the house - went on the second transport. We weren't told where we were going, only that we were going somewhere to work. To my knowledge, there were three transports in all at a couple of days intervals and not one Jewish soul was left behind in all those towns and villages. I had occasion later on to speak to Polish Jews, Chech Jews and others who were able to survive by hiding out, of Christians sheltering Jews, I read different accounts by survivors, but I don't know of even one family or one Jewish soul to have remained behind and saved by hiding out in our region.

The cattle cars had one or two tiny windows. The doors were barred from the outside. We were packed so tightly there wasn't enough room for everyone to sit down on the floor. We travelled for three days without being let off the train. We had only the food we had brought along and no water. The biggest suffering was from thirst. Whatever liquid, juices we had was kept for the babies and small children. I remember I took my turn once at one of the little windows to get some air, we were passing through beautiful landscapes of small villages and fields, orchards, streams, every now and then one could see people busy with their daily chores as if they had no idea what those trains were carrying - and cared even less. The train stopped in a few stations, the soldiers opened the door for a few minutes - I don't remember what for - I assume someone had to empty the bucket that served for our "toilett facility" - we begged, implored them for water, to no awail. The

stench was unbearable. There was no loud crying or lament except from the small children. A kind of apathy had settled over us. I could hardly wait to get to destination which in my naivete I still thought would be a work camp. Looking at this situation later on, with adult eyes, I can just imagine the anguish, the terror our elders had experienced, the incredible heartbreak when reality downed on them and sensing that most likely we were on our last trip, a trip to a dead end - literally.

On a drizzly, dark morning the train stopped. There was a thick fog over Birkenau-Auschwitz, but we could see electric lights further in the distance casting a dim light thru the fog. These were - as we found out later - electric lights set up at precise intervals on top of the barbed wire fences surrounding the camps. Many a tortured soul had put an end to their misery by touching the high voltage electrified wire.

When the doors were unbarred, a kind of mad rush started, yellings and screamings, shouts of "Raus, Raus" out, out, we were rushed to get off the train by SS men as well as by inmates of the camp who worked at the unloading and whose job it was, the Germans patrolling with their huge dogs, a cacaphony of voices, families trying to stay together, children crying, worse than any madhouse. Women and children were separated from the men and everybody had to get in line, we had to form lines of five - the Nazis, it seems had some unknown reason or fascination with lines of five!

My grandma Beila, aunt Rozsi and some other relatives were in a row ahead of my mother and the four of us, sisters. After a short walk we passed in front of some SS men with dogs and one SS man with a stick pointing to the direction each of us should go, to the right or to the left. It was May and the weather was still chilly, I had some coat on, but was still cold and my mother had bundled me up in her shawl, on top of the coat, it was a green and white crocheted woolen shawl, I would never forget it. Later on I came to believe that that shawl may have saved my life. I didn't know it at the time, but not many fifteen year olds had been left alive at that initial selection, they went to the gas chambers along with the younger children.

Being bundled up as I was, with my face half covered by the shawl I must have looked older and thus, my life was spared - at least, that 's how I saw it.

The SS man with the stick - who according to people more aware than I - was Mengele himself, the infamous doctor, nicknamed the "Angel of Death" who played G-d sending people to right or left, most to death and the others to an uncertain fate.

, I saw my aunt Rozsi in front of me being separated and sent to one side and right after that it was our turn, the stick was directing me to where Rozsi went and my mother and sister to the opposite direction. I can't recall any thoughts, all I know is that I ran after my aunt in a panic not to lose her. I certainly never thought that that dreadfull foggy morning would be the last time I would see my mother and sisters - alive or dead.

We were marched in a column of five again for a short while until we reached a building where - we were told - we would take showers

Now, the process of dehumanization began in earnest. Outside, in front of the building we were told to strip naked leaving the clothing on the floor and keep the shoes only. I well remember the embarassment. That wasn't a time when people were used to nudity as they are today. People tried to cover up with their hands especially those who were caught in the middle of their monthly cycle. Then our hair was shorn off to the skin by other inmates, given some soap and sent to the showers, one large room with showerheads. We didn't get any towels, but when finished showering we were handed out a thin, cottonlike, shapeless gray dress. I have no memory of receiving any underwear, I really don't think so. This dress and our shoes were all our wordly possessions. The weather was nasty and we were standing what felt for an eternity and shivering. Finally, we were sent to a huge room with tables and chairs where each if us got a postcard and ordered to write "home". What a sham! As if they didn't know that we no longer had a home. Years later, when I thought of this "nice touch" by the Germans I wasn't sure anymore if it had

really happened, I had asked around and no one remembered it. Only relatively recently have I found mention of these postcards in a Holocaust related book. I recall writing to a girl, a former schoolmate I had been friendly with. I doubt that these card were even mailed, or perhaps they were, to better deceive the world.

While we were kept outside we could see on the other side, separated from us by a wire fence, other women dressed just like us. Someone from that side suddenly threw a chunk of bread that fell right at my feet. I picked it up. It looked and felt like a piece of brick, heavy black brick and I remember I was unable to eat it, it also tasted like brick and I hadn't yet been famished enough. If I could have had it later, it's taste would have been heavenly!

As I have later found out, the camp where we spent most of our first day was called the "cziganer lager" or the "Gypsy Camp." Apparently, there had been - or there still were - Gypsies in that camp. They suffered the same fate, the Nazis didn't care for them either. Anyway, we were finally lined up again and this time we were marched toanother camp, we passed through a large gate where an SS watchtower stood and above which was the inscription - well known today - "Arbeit Macht Frei!" (Work makes you free). The name of this camp was "C lager". All this time I stuck to my aunt Rozsi, four years older than I and both of us were placed in Block #7(barracks #7).

To my knowledge, there were thirty or so barracks in Camp C, to our right and left were similar camps, divided by an electrified wire fence. The barracks were divided roughly by half facing each other. Between them was a large space for vehicles or people to move about. There was also a fairly large space behind each barracks where people lined up each morning and evening in order to be counted. This was called "Zeil Appel". The barracks were rectangular in shape, I don't recall any windows, perhaps the gate in front had a window on top. At the front there was a room for the "Blockelteste", the woman in charge who was herself a deportee,

mostly from earlier transports from Poland. A lot of these block-elteste women had been in camps for years before us, got hardened by the much suffering and didn't have much sympathy for us, Hungarian Jews, who - they said - went like sheep to the slaughter. There were also a few helpers, selected from our ranks, they were called "Stubendienst" they helped with the food distribution and to maintain order. Above everybody was the "Capo" of the camp also mostly Jewish. These Jewish people in authority - or, I should say some of them - would sometimes behave brutally and cruelly to the deportees and some of them paid for it with thei lives after liberation.

In the beginning, when someone asked when we would see our family we would be told to have patience that it wouldn't take too long. We were fed that story by the people - older inmates - who prepared us for the showers and later,the blockelteste. Some got hysterical just the same, yelling and wailing. They were punched, beaten until they shut up. I don't remember how many days, or perhaps weeks it took before the blockelteste annoyed at our constant pestering about the whereabouts of our families finally blurted it out. Raising her hand in the air she said: "There they go, in the smoke!" The crematoria was in Birkenau, some distance away, but lots of times we could see the flames and smoke that enveloped the camp, especially at night and smell the peculiar smell of Auschwitz..For a long time after liberation I would sometimes think that I smell that smell again.

Inside, the barracks had two rows of three-tiered bunks against the walls. In the middle, along the barracks ran a low structure made of concrete where deportees could sit sometimes. Ten people slept on one bunk tier, also ate their meals there most of the time since the coffee and soup were distributed inside the barracks, by bunk. To my knowledge, there were about onethousand souls in one barracks and some thirty or thirty-two barracks in "C"lager. In the middle of the camp-grounds somewhere there was a barracks with rows and rows of toiletts , or, I should say, toilett seats one next to the other, the same way, there was a "Washroom" with rows and rows of shower-heads - that was in a different barracks. We got the drinking water also from this "Washroom". There was not the slightest

privacy anywhere.

Camp "C" was supposedly a "Holding camp". In time we found out - at least that was the rumor - that we were held there on account of the overload at the crematoria, just waiting until we could be fit in. We didn't get the usual tattoo on the arm, few of us went out to work. we were not expected to survive for long.

My aunt Rozsi and I got to occupy the third - the highest - bunk. Everyone had to leave their shoes underneath the lowest bunk. I believe we had a straw mattress and some blankets, I am not sure exactly.

The first morning in camp we were awakened by a shrill whistle and yellings by the blockelteste and rushed to the place outside along the barracks and told to line up in rows of five for the "Zeil Appel" the head counting. We had to find our shoes from among thirty pairs amid a mad rush and confusion and whoever wasn't fast enough got slapped around by the "blockelteste". That morning I too got a good slap in the face.

I don't know why that mad rush was necessary since we were usually kept lined up hours before the SS man or woman would come to count us. We were usually rushed out around four o'clock, well before daybreak, our meager breakfast wouldn'tbe served until after the Zeil Appel. I don't know about the others, but I don't think I understood a thing of what was happening to me, to us all, I was so naive, I had no comprehension of the evil I was surrounded by, a nightmare from which there was no awakening.

After the counting, while still in the line-up, the "stuben-dienst" would distribute the piece of bread for the day as well as some margarine and cheese. (That was the first time for me that I learned about the existence of margarine). Then back inside, we would climb up the bunks and some kind of a dark drink -coffee- would be distributed. For lunch-dinner, a kind of beet soup would be brought from the camp kitchen in large containers. Each bunk of ten got two large bowls from which everyone took turns sipping since we had no spoons or any other utensils.

We wandered around the camp aimlessly, went off to other barracks looking for relatives, friends, any familiar face. In this way my aunt Reizi - my mother's sister - found me and came to stay in my barracks. Of all my aunts, perhaps Reizi was the closest to me. She used to come often to Krivei to help my mother when she wasn't feeling well or other occasions. All my aunts were pretty girls and very bright and lively. My father's youngest brother, Kalman, fell in love with Reizi and I think, that feeling was mutual. When the two of them went for a walk Reizi was always willing to take me along, a kind of a chaperone, I guess, which didn't please my uncle too much! Kalman was very good-looking, tall and more fair than his siblings. He was also an avid reader, just likemy father and would often question me on the books I read. It was on one of these walks that my aunt Reizi lectured me: "It isn't enough to know the title of the book you read, you should also know the name of the author" and went on to explain why that was important and what else was important about a book.

As I mentioned earlier, Reizi and Suri were identical twins, not even my mother could distinguish between the two. If one of them came to visit they liked to keeo it a secret who was the one visiting, wanted us to guess first. But Kalman always knew at first glance which of the sisters was the visitor. Unfortunately, this romance never had a chance. I had heard from someone that Kalman died in the camps a few days before liberation.

All my mother's siblings - including her - had beautiful voices. My mother loved to sing, she sang mainly in Yiddish and Hungarian, some of the songs I still remember now. When, not long ago I received a CD from my son-in-law Steven Rosenberg titled "Benken" (a series of nostalgic songs) and I recognized some of the songs my mother used to sing I couldn't help crying like a kid. I remember someone coming to our house on some errand and asking: "Who is playing the violine?" It was only my mother,singing. Only my cousin Rachel (Suri's daughter) is actually using her voice to some purpose. She participates in a choir in Israel that tours abroad regularly. My uncle Motti's love for music took a different route, he became a great Opera fan, never misses a good performance, spends lots of money on recordings. On an occasion when I visited Israel he told me: "I could have been a great Chazan, but we were all so ignorant, none of us have really

lived up to their potential".

People continuosly changed barracks. The SS couldn't distinguish individuals and didn't care, what mattered to them was the total count for the individual barracks. So, if at the time of Zeil Appel there were more people in one barracks they would just pick the overage and send them to the barracks where there was a minus.

After a couple of months or so, Rozsi left my barracks. Occasionally, there were "selections", times when when we were all herded out to the Zeil Appel place, lined up by five's and some civilians and SS would come to look us over like so many cattle and pick out some people for work. We were , naturally, not told a thing, but the rumor was that the Nazis supplied workers to plants, factories, farms, etc. People dreaded these "selections"because at such times. relatives or friends were separated and no amount of crying or begging -if one dared- would help change a thing. On one such selection Rozsi was picked and I was left with my aunt Reizi who was about 21-22 years old at the time and I credit her for saving my life, for a number of reasons. Rozsi was tattood, sent to work, survived and and eventually emigrated and is living in Haifa at present.

The selections were dreaded for another reason too, especially after we had been in camp for a little while and started to understand - and believe the unbelievable - what was really going on. During the first couple of weeks we didn't believe the rumors we had heard or even the things we had been told outright by the blockelteste. But when time went by and the promises that "you'll be reunited with your families shortly" didn't materialize and all the other signs and disappearences, our minds had to slowly adjust to this reality. Therefore, we were never sure what a selection meant. Were we selected to work - life- or death -, to be fed to the ovens, to get rid of the weak and frail looking.

In the course of my 6-7 months in Auschwitz I was repeatedly taken out from the line-up at Zeil Appel time and sent over to the "Kinderblock" a barracks almost vis-a-vis our barracks, #9 or 10, I

don't quite remember which. I was short and getting skinny and without any hair and at fifteen years of age I don't know what the SS thought, but they wanted me in the children's block. To my knowledge, that was the only children's barracks in camp "C". If at all possible, the conditions in this barracks were even more dreadful. First, the poor kids - girls ages eight to mid teens - were kept under "blockshpere" locked up for much longer periods than the other barracks. They were marked for extermination and so the minimum order required for functioning was ignored by the "Blockelteste" and"stubendienst"women, it was complete chaos.

I was eager to get out of there, I was waiting for when the "BLockshpere" would be lifted and I could steal back across to block #7. Even had the conditions in the kinderbarracks been more favorable I would have tried anything to get back to my aunt. Had I not had that incentive, to be with my aunt, perhaps I would have given up and stayed there and my fate would have been the same as all the others'.

Besides having Reizi's moral support she also helped me survive in other, practical ways. The first time our lunch? dinner? was brought around, the soup with beets and who knows what else, and we were forced to take turns sipping it straight from the bowl, my insides turned over, I simply gagged, could not swallow it. For the rest of the time while in Auschwitz, I had the same reaction no matter how hungry I was. My aunt realizing that my reaction would not go away, started giving me part of her bread and she would drink my soup. Sometimes, we could find a piece of potatoe in the soup, what a "treasure". In the course of my camp life, I would eat raw potatoe peals, if I could only find them, but not that soup. We would try to keep a piece of the bread we received at the morning Zeil Appeal for later in the afternoon or evening, but most of us couldn't resist the hunger and ~~eat~~ ate it all.

After a few weeks in camp I got sick, with a high fever, I was burning up. By that time we knew already that it wasn't safe to complain or go to the infirmary. The infirmary was staffed with inmate doctors, they did what they could, but there was hardly

any medication available, only the very sick, those unable to get to their feet and stand in the Zeil Appel line were taken there. It was as good as a death sentence. Sowhen the time of Zeil Appel came I went outside to line up as usual.

It was a rainy morning, it waspouring steadily and as usual, we stayed in line for hours. The SS weren't going to come out in the rain to count us! So, I stayed there fever and all and perhaps the rain helped bring down the fever because I didn't get any worse than before and gradually I got better.

From time to time the Nazis would empty a whole barracks. They came at night, they came with trucks and took people away. At such time a "Blockshpere" would be announced for the whole camp. It didn't always happen at night either, it also happened during the days. We could hear the trucks rumbling through the camp, we knew what it meant. When blockshpere was finally lifted, we would hear that this block or that block was empty. Until the next victims, a new transport!

There would also be ordered a "Blockshpere" when Allied planes flew over the camp. Sometimes they would fly so low, we thought they were right over the roof. We were not scared, on the contrary, we were excited and we would wonder whether they knew what they were seeing.

Sometimes these "lock-ups" would last for hours and hours. Summer came and the weather turned hot, with no water inside and no toiletts we were even more miserable. We were dying of thirst. Once in a while someone would brave the danger and and venture out to get water, maybe bring back a cup, as we didn't possess any large containers. As the girl with the precious cup of water would pass along the row of bunks on the way to her own, people would beg for just one sip. I can still hear it now : "Egy kortyot, csak egy kortyot!" (One sip, one sip only!)

We deteriorated rapidly, hungry, weak and apathetic, we spent most of the time lying on our bunks, dreaming and talking about food, past feasts, food became the whole focus of our

lives. A lot of us got sick with an itching all over our bodies, brought on by the terrible sanitary conditions. Sores broke out all over the body and there was no help for it. I too was one of those afflicted and I remember staying or lying naked in the sun so that the sores would dry up. Being naked in public had become normal - after common showers, common toilletts and sometimes naked line-ups for selections. We were apathetic to the extreme. The rumor was that we were being fed some drugs that kept us like that and also had the effect of eliminating the menstrual flow. Perhaps, it was only the weakness at the root of it all, but I had heard from many women that that was the case.

We learned the Camp lingo. People only skin and bones were called "Muselmen" and the word "organize" meant getting hold of some item - by whatever means, even stealing - be it a piece of bread, a spoon or a piece of cloth. My aunt Reizi "organized" some pieces of white linen and we made kerchiefs for our shorn heads and eventually we got hold of cups and spoons. Our posessions were hidden in our bunks, under the blankets. Sometimes they were stolen and we would have to organize again. But the most common way of acquiring anything was through barter. Women deportees who worked in the huge warehouses where deportees posessions were sorted would, occasionally, be able to smuggle out and bring back to camp some items to trade for a piece of bread or margarine. Women who worked in the kitchens could sometimes bring back a potatoe or two and share it with others.

Occasionally, we were able to use a little trick. I don't know who came up with it. When the food - bread and cheese or margarine - was doled out to us as we were standing in the line, the system was that the person in front of the line would get all the five portions and she would divide them. So we would form another line a few rows ahead with someone else in front and this way get a double ration. But this didn't work for long. it eventually became too risky.

Occasionally, we were marched to Birkenau for showers and delousing. At one such time, we descarded our gray uniform dresses and were given civilian clothing - dresses discarded by victims on arrival. I got a brown and gold, longsleeved heavy cotton

dress, buttoned in front and that was the dress I wore for a very long time, until I left Auschwitz sometime in August or September - it could have been even October, I didn't keep track. I am inclined to think that it was in the fall of 1944 when we were ordered to line up for a special selection. Some SS men came with some civilians and looked over the lines. We were naked, as was the custom for these occasions - it was a slave-market after all! A group of women was picked,including my aunt and luckily, I was picked too. We were marched to a place - I don't recall how far - and told to wait in front of a building, where, we were told, we would take showers. Here I had an experience which had a profound effect on me, on my whole outlook on life and which I have never forgotten.

It was drizzling lightly and we had been standing, waiting there what it seemed like forever when a blockelteste came out of the building and standing on the steps addressed us: "You fools, you think you are going to the showers? You are going up there, in smoke like the rest of your families, that's where you are going!".

I cannot imagine what hatred, what bitterness prompted her to say that to us, but we believed her. It didn't occur to anyone to doubt her because - as I said _ we were never sure whether people picked at selections were indeed sent to work or to the gas chambers. In any event, there was an immediate reaction. Some started crying and wailing, others started praying. I was doing neither, but was thinking to myself: "I don't want to die, I want once more to know what it feels like not to be hungry, I want a place of my own no matter how tiny, I want to feel clean again with a decent dress on my back, I want to be able to read books once more and I promised G-d that if I am saved'I would be good, I wouldn't want much, I won't complain and be satisfied always'. So, in a way, I too prayed, the prayer of a fifteen year old, what else could I offer G-d?

Foolish promises notwithstanding, I often remember that feeling of close call to death; though this wasn't the first time that I was close to death, I hadn't yet had the knowledge

of iminent demise as I had this time. But, even at the last minute one always hopes for deliverance, there probably isn't a stronger instinct than the will to live.

I often remember my promises to G-d and most especially when I feel unhappy or hurt and it helps put things in perspective. I didn't and never have craved for things, posessions above the necessities for a decent life. If I have them I surely enjoy them but, if I don't it doesn't make me any less content. Our focus - as for most survivors - have been our children. We have put our unfulfilled dreams into them - which sometimes might not have been so good for them - feeling our expectations and striving to fulfill them. The focus was on education, we knew from bitter experience that everything can be taken away from you except what's in your head. What I wanted for my kids was to be self-supportive, independent, never to have to rely on another person. Overall, most of the survivors' children have become educated individuals, contributing in manydifferent ways to the betterment of humanity. As for myself, I couldn't be more proud of my two daughters Lia and Ruthy and their families. Lia was named after my mother Feiga-Leah, Ruthy - as I said before- after grandma Beila and my sister Raczi. Lia's children, Daniella Zahava is named after Mollie Nissel's mother Goldie, Shira Rachel is named after my grandma Rachel and Joshua I believe was named after a member of Billy's family. Ruthy's children, Elie was named after my father(Mordechai Eliezer), but he couldn't be given both names because my son-in-law, Steven's father Marcus Rosenberg was also a "Mordechai" and still alive, thank G-d. Next, Ariela Sara, named after Sruli's mother (Sura-Lea) and Yardena Shoshana (Dana)named after my aunt Reizi (Shoshana in Hebrew). I have been lucky too and thankful to G-d for the two sons-in-law Billy Nissel and Steven Rosenberg who have become very close and dear to me.

To resume my story, eventually we took the showers, received clean, different dresses, were put on yet another cattle train and shipped off to work. There were about one hundred of us.'

I don't recall exactly how long this journey lasted.We arrived at a small village called Weisswasser in the Sudeten part od Chechoslovakia. We found a camp there atop of a hill that looked newly built. It was surrounded by the usual electrified wire fences and the watchtower. There were no other deportees there. The camp was staffed mostly with women SS guards - they could be even more vicious than the males. Nearby, there was quite a bit of what looked like a field once planted with crops. Later, when hunger made us forage for food in any way

(OVER)

There was an ammunitions factory in the village, at least that what we thought it was, another version was that the factory was producing airplane parts. Even after liberation we weren't quite sure what it's purpose was - at least, I have never found' out. Anyway, we were soon put to work.

We worked twelve hour shifts, day and night, alternating weekly. A few of us, myself included worked at a table with - what I think it's called "Benson burners" and our job was to suture certain wires on small gadgets to the right places. We had a quota, a certain number of this gadgets had to be done and taken over to the forman for inspection. The formah was a local person and it was forbidden for us to communicate. Other girls worked in other areas, other kind of jobs. In time, a certain amount of sabotage would take place by making defective parts, thank G-d, no one discovered it. I had a small replica of the gadgets I worked on and brought it back with me to Romania, but lost it somewhere. I don't think I was too attached to it! I don't think that in those days it ever crossed my mind that a time would come when I would need to prove anything, otherwise I would have paid more attention to certain details - like the name of the factory, forexample. We stayed on - a few of us - after liberation for some time, it never occurred to me to inquire, who could think of such things, at such a time!

In this same factory (or plant) there worked a bunch of French prisoners of war. They were separated from us, but in some areas they could be seen at a distance by some of the girls. These guys were able and occasionally did throw over to the girls small packages of food, a piece of chocholate, an apple, a biscuiti, etc., goodies they received from packages sent to them through the Red Cross. Sometimes they would attach a note relating news about the war, especially if there was some good news. The Frenchmen picked out the prettier girls for these food offerings (of course!)and in time the correspondence - one-sided as it was - would develop into a form of love notes, their contents in most cases becoming known to all of us and providing us a few moments of normality, of enjoyment..

My aunt Reizi also had an admirer and received a few small packages, whatever she received she always shared it with me.

We were awakened at dawn (I'm not sure exactly at what hour) by the factory siren, we would do our bunks, have some breakfast, then line up in rows of five and march to the factory, guarded by SS women and their dogs. In this camp there weren't any deportees in charge of us as there were in Auschwitz. The road to the factory wasn't very long. We worked for straight twelve hours without any break - it was either from six to six or seven to seven. In a way, the night shifts were a little easier to take as our supervisors were also more sluggish and sleepy, less strict, but either way, twelve hours work for already debilitated, perpetually starved bodies and dispirited souls couldn't have been borne much longer but by the strongest - in body as well as mind.

Gradually, as the war situation got worse for the Nazis, our meals got worse and worse, the hunger once again became unbearable. We dug the earth with bare hands and somebody would sometimes come up with a potatoe. That was a real piece of good luck! I had once a raw potatoe and it tasted delicious. I told myself that if I will be ever free again I'll feast on raw potatoes! AS it happens, I did try at one point after liberation to taste it, but, of course, it didn't taste remotely the same. Same goes for potatoe peals, they tasted delicious, unfortunately, we didn't have enough of those either. Icame to the conclusion that the taste of food depends on the degree of one's hunger. After liberation, food for me became a non-issue, as long as I could satisfy my hunger I didn't much discriminate while others went on the opposite direction, becoming very choosey.

We were on the verge of becoming "musulmen", all of us. A few of the girls died and were buried on the campgrounds. They had become too weak to work and were languishing in the infirmary for awhile, but they weren't fed any better anyway, even though, as it turned out, there were still lots of potatoes buried in the earth bunkers in the field adjacent to the camp. We used

to get an almost empty soup, only with a few beets floating in it. I had been a chubby little girl and stayed so through my early teens, in fact, quite overweight, though I knew even then that it wasn't a good way to be and tried to looseweight. But, for once, I think that being heavy probably helped me survive, but I doubt that anyone, desperate to lose weight, would care to try my diet!

While still in Auschwitz, in spite of the terrible hunger, the lice, the squalor, the degradation, the viciousness exhibited by some in charge of us - blockelteste, kapos, (not to mention the Nazis) in spite of the apathy that had engulfed us, there still remained in most of us a grain of hope. That grain of hope was all important, otherwise - as not a few have done - the electric high voltage wires were a handy means to end all misery. We had heard rumors that the war wasn't going too well for the Nazis, that the end was nearing, but we feared it should'nt come too late for us. Once in a while, in the evenings, one or other of the girls with good voices would sing for us, mostly in Yiddish or Hungarian. I still remember one particular song with a beautiful tune, it goes something like this (in Hungarian):

"Hivnak engem messze foldre balzsamos hegyek,
Vege lesz a szenvedesnek, en hazamegyek.
Otthon, otthon meggyogyul majd minden ami faj.
Am Israel Chai, Ad bli dai" etc.
I'll try to translate:
" I hear the call of balsam mountains, In far away land,
I shall go home, my suffering will end,
The Jewish people live and will go on without end"!
There were other songs reflecting emotions related to our situation and were adapted to well known tunes. At any rate, most people's thoughts - if they dared hope for a future - were directed to a future in Palestine, no one thought of going back to the towns and villages from which we were so cruelly uprooted. We became "Zionists" without putting a label on our feelings, did that make us "Racists?" I wonder who the big "hacham", the "wise" person was who came up with the slogan "zionism equales racism", what foolishness! Just look at the thousands of survivors who languished in the displaced persons camps sometimes for years before they were able to reach Palestine. Even if

they went back for one reason or another as my ~~two~~ aunts Reizi, Suri and Raczi (Rutie) and uncle Motti did, after a short stay, they packed a backpack with all their wordly posessions and crossed the border to Hungary, back to Germany to a D.P. camp and after two years of wanderings finally reached Palestine. And look at the thousands of survivors who braved the seas on run down, half-disintegrating old ships, the many who lost their lives in trying to reach Palestine, hunted by the British patrol ships. And the many marooned on Cyprus, courtesy of our British friends. My aunt Suri, the twin of Reizi, had gotten married after returning to Romania and then,both of them emigrated taking a ship from Constanta. They were kept on Cyprus long enough to have given birth to their first child, my cousin Rachel - named, of course, after grandma Rachel. If that means being a Zionist, of course we were Zionists and no appologies are needed.

To be sure, Zionism wasn't a new concept, not even for me, living as I was in a back of the woods village. I can recall a time when there was a Hachshara in the village. A bunch of guys would come to town, take over the "Sopron" the huge barnlike structure in the garden of my grandma Beila that was used to ware-house bales of hay and the crates of apples. From spring thru fall - when the barn was empty or almost empty, these guys made it their headquarters. They worked in the fields, tried to learn farming and other skills in preparation of their emigration to Palestine.

I probably wasn't aware of much that was going on in the camp in Weisswasser, especially during the last couple of months when the weakness from the prolonged hunger made me - and I'm sure, most of us - lethargic, using whatever energy we still had to work in the factory. We were on the verge of becoming "Mu-sulmen", what sustained us mostly at this point was that perhaps, the end is near, whatever that end may be.

The frontline was steadily moving closer, sometimes when the wind blew in the right direction we could make out the sounds of shootings, of explosions. The Russians were making their way in our direction and we didn't know what to expect. Rumors started

circulating that the Nazis would dynamite the camp, killing us all before fleeing. Our spirits had sunk so low that we were not even fantasising about food anymore, I mean, not even talking
'8 /90 about it any longer, as we did in Auschwitz. It is a miracle that as many of us survived still with a sane mind! I don't know how sane, but at least sane enough to function!

Finally, the end came and this is how it happened:

On the morning of May 6, 1945, we didn't hear the wake-up call from the factory. I have forgotten many details, but scenes from that morning are vivid in my mind. We had dressed, made-up our bunks and waited. After a while, someone ventured outside and came back to report that no SS guard could be seen anywhere. Still, we were afraid to go out of the barracks. As more time went by, we started getting excited. More people went outside and took a few steps on the grounds, but still afraid to go any further. Then all of a sudden we heard a big noise, a banging at the gates of the camp. The French prisoners of war were there, they broke open the gates for us, told us it was over, the war was finally over, all Nazis have fled the area, we were finally free!

Our joy can well be imagined or perhaps, it cannot be! We laughed and cried and hugged each other. Most of us were so young, our hopes were reborn, hopes to be reunited with brothers, or sisters, or as in my case, I hoped that perhaps my father survived and I'll find him back home. I was almost exactly sixteen years and one month old.

After we calmed down a little bit, the first thing we did was to raid the kitchens. We found very little there, but some of us knew where the potatoes were stored in the ground, we dug them out, made fires on the camp grounds and boiled large pots of potatoes, we got hold of some margarine and we had a feast. We overate, of course, many of us got sick and threw up, it was lucky that there were no heavy meats or sausages there, that could have been a real killer.

Once our hunger was satisfied we formed small groups and descended on the village of Weisswasser. My aunt Reizi, three sisters by the name of Taubman and another girlfrom Viseul de Sus decided to keep together. The sisters were from the same village as my aunt, The name of the other girl escapes me.

Weisswasser was deserted, there was not a soul outside. The villagers had locked themselves in in their homes, I don't think they were afraid of us, more likely they were apprehensive and concerned regarding the approaching Soviet army. What the newly liberated women looked for were the houses abandoned by the Nazis and their collaborators in order to get some decent clothing, food, etc.

We came to a large house where we found already others wandering around, looking at things, picking up, dropping them or simply taking them. We found bales of fabrics and we took some, I saw someone take a set of cutlery, another a bycicle, I think the idea was to trade things in for food and shelter. We had almost a day - one day - to roam freely in the village before the arrival of the Russians. But there wasn't much one could carry by hand and since we were so weak we could carry even less and things were dropped by the roadside leaving a trail of all kind of objects in our passage. Above all, we were a wild bunch full of rage in search of vengeance, a pitiful vengeance, wreaking havoc of the nice Nazi homes from which our tormentors had long since fled and weren't there to feel our pain.

Evening came and we didn't want to go back to the camp. We knocked on the houses of the villagers and asked to be taken in. An older Chech couple agreed to let us have the attic. All of us spoke Ruthenian and we were able to communicate somehow, Chech being also a Slavic language.

Later that evening the Russian troops entered the village. This was a mountaineous region and there were still Nazis holed up in the mountains. For days after the Russians had arrived, we could still hear the sounds of shootings, sometimes they seemed to come from just behind the house.

In a very short time all girls from the camp dispersed. I

had heard later that some just started walking, in groups, trying to reach some larger city, catching a ride here and there. We decided to stay put for awhile. The war was over, but Europe was in ruins, trains and railway networks destroyed, there was really nowhere to go. Hundreds of thousands displaced persons were clogging the highways, the big train stations, hoping to catch an occasional functioning train.

After a short stay in the village, rumors of rape by Russian soldiers started surfacing. We were scared, we tried to avoid being seen, but soldiers were all over the village, some were stationed right across the street. So, we divised a plan. The attic we lived in had a wall of large boards and behind that wall was some empty space. You could lift one or two boards and replace them in no time and nothing was noticeable. So it was agreed that if Russians entered the house all older girls would hide behind the wall and I, the youngest, would stay in place to receive them. I was short and thin and looked very young, more like a child and the girls assumed I was in no danger. I am thinking now, maybe I looked like I could frighten them off! Anyway, I went along with this plan, it never even occured to me to argue. Had I been aware of the stories I heard later about the Russians, I don't know what we would have done.

As it happens, it turned out exactly as anticipated. One late afternoon a group of Russians entered the house, we could hear them talking to the old Chech couple. The girls quickly hid behind the partition. The y came up the stairs to the attic, there were five of them. They started throwing questions at me, where were the other girls, are they out, when will they be back, etc., I understood them well - Ruthenian, I think, is even more similar to Russian than the Chech - but I pretended not to. I kept repeating the same few words: "Flichtling (deportee), Romanian Jew" "Concentration Camp". I don;t recall whether we had agreed on this scenario or whther I improvised, but after a few minutes of this verbal exchange one of the Russian soldiers said to the others: "Let's go, I know of another place where we can find girls", and luckily, they left. Two days later, our

landlady came up to us with a message. There was a Russian officer downstairs asking our permission to come up and talk to us. That sounded very gentlemanly - we didn't have a choice anyway - so we said yes, he can come. He introduced himself and told us that he was Jewish and not to be afraid, we won't be bothered by his men any more. Apparently, he was in charge. He asked us all kind of questions regarding our experiences, then left. We speculated afterward that the soldier in the group that had come up earlier must have also been Jewish and he deliberately steered the others away when he heard what I was saying and most probably, mentioned us to his commander, the Jewish officer, with a Yiddishe neshama!

Eventually, the Russians moved on and we also started thinking of leaving. I think that the Chech couple also was eager already for us to leave. We weren't a burden on them, we kept on "organizing" going back to the Nazi homes, bringing any foodstuff we could find, whole sacks of flour, etc. and giving it to our landlords. Food was scarce in the village and what we brought came in handy. We also brought them things, I remember some lamps, a typewriter, odds and ends, useful or not. We must have spent a few weeks in Weisswasser, I figure, between four and six weeks. We put on some weight, got some strength back, hair on our heads and started looking more human. I recall that at some point during our stay we had an opportunity to weigh ourselves and I weighed already some 46 kilos.

One day, we said good-bye to our hosts, got a ride in a peasant cart and hitching other rides along the way, we made our way to Bratislava. I don't recall how long that took. In Bratislava we went to an office - the American Joint had opened some centers for returning survivors where they gotsome assistance, we got some hot meals, perhaps some money, and everywhere we went we encountered other survivors. There was always an exchange of information, like "Where are you from? What camps have you been in?", which brought us to the next main point: "Have you seen or heard of anyone by such and such a name?" Each of us was trying to gain information about relatives, friends or just "landsleit" with the hopethat we would hear of someone alive. There were lists of survivors posted

in the Jewish offices, lists of those who passed through on their way to various destinations; sometimes a small miracle happened and we could witness a reunion between family members who found each other accidently, the joy and the sorrow greater than a human being could endure at one and the same time.

We spent a few days - and nights - in the train station of Bratislava. By that time there had been already trains running out of Bratislava, but far from enough. People fought, literally, for a seat on the trains or even for a place on top of it. One didn't even need train tickets - at least I don't recall buying any, I don't see how anyone could have even collected tickets from that pushing, shoving mass of people.

Finally, the six of us were able to find space on the top of a train and were on our way to Budapest, hoping from there to get to Romania and finally to Sighet which region had become again part of Romania as had the whole area known as Transylvania.

Some time during the night the train stopped in an area devoid of dwellings, an area of open fields only. A band of Russian soldiers got on top of the train and started robbing people of their belongings, throwing valises and bundles off the train where other bandits collected them. Anf if that weren't enough, they started pulling off the trains women who caught their fancy, there was much yelling and cryings, it was very frightening. Like Nazis all over again!

Our turn came and we were also relieved of our pitiful bundles and once again we had only the clothon our backs. But it mattered little, we were glad to have escaped further trouble. We had been fearful for two of the Taubman sisters who were very pretty girls. Finally, the train moved on and we eventually arrived in Budapest. I came to think later that perhaps those bandits weren't really Russian soldiers, they just dressed like them. There was such lawlessness all over!

In Budapest we went to the Joint office where we got some food and money. They put us up -along with others- in a room

and we ate at their canteen. There were many survivors streaming through Budapest. But we had no interest of prolonging our stay. The Hungarians, staunch allies of the Nazis, had been defeated, the city was pretty much in ruins, one could almost smell the athmosphere of defeat hanging around people and places. We stayed for about three days in Budapest, but strangely enough, I don't recall much about the rest of the journey. My last recollection is an out of the way place with trees and bushes, like the margin of a forest, perhaps the margin of a river, but whatever that was, it must have been along the border of Romania. I only vaguely remember a crossing, whether by foot, by cart, or perhaps there was a bridge, I cannot tell. Fact was, that wherever we crossed, it was very close to Sighet, our final destination for the time being.

We arrived in Sighet toward the end of June, 1945. Here our group separated and I haven't met any of them ever again. They were girls in their early twenties, like my aunt Reizi so there didn't develop any close friendship between me and them. I once tried to get in touch with one of the Taubman girls who was living at the time in California - that was in 1966, after we got to the U.S. I needed a witness, a written declaration for an application I was sending for "Wiedergutmachung", that is, reparations. I am ashamed to say that the reply I received was that their lawyer had advised them not to get involved!!! It didn't matter much, both my husband and I didn't get anything because by the time we got out of Romania the time limit for applications had expired. Still, It was a painful feeling, a great disappointment to have received such an answer, almost a betrayal. (Years later, the reparations issue was reopened).

So here we were in Sighet, Reizi and I and found other survivors who had come back earlier, some men from the forced labor camps and almost all survivors - whether from Sighet or from the surrounding smaller towns and villages - stayed in Sighet, at least temporarily. Some stayed waiting to see who or if anyone else from the family would show up, some wanted to sell out whatever their family had posessed before moving on and others simply couldn't decide what to do. There was a cafeteria set up by the Joint for survivors where one

could get a free meal and housing was no problem, there were plenty empty Jewish homes.

Reizi and I moved into such an empty house, previously owned by a relative. We used to go to the cafeteria to meet and exchange information with others and listen to their experiences. Almost each day, someone new would show up and we would hear of other survivors on their way back. This way we found out that Suri and Raczi (or Ruthie) mother's sisters have also survived and were on their way back to Sighet. To the best of my knowledge, there was not one old Jewish man or woman and not one Jewish child in that year in all of Sighet!

The non-Jewish population wasn't too happy to see the survivors. They were reluctant to evacuate the Jewish homes, to return what didn't belong to them, furniture, rugs, pianos, etc. taken from the abandoned homes. They had dug up cellars and backyards searching for buried "treasures". As a matter of fact, some did hide valuables in such places, some family members did find them upon return, others did not.

As soon as Suri and Raczi joined us, we all left Sighet and went to Dej, a nice city also in Transylvania. An uncle, Shloimi, who had been the husband of Miriam (one of my mother's sister) had returned from forced labor camp and had invited us all to go live in his house, at least until we know what we wanted to do with our lives. (Miriam and their first baby perished in Auschwitz.)Soon after, my uncle Motti joined us too. There was another sister who survived, Ruchel, now living in Brooklyn. She was the only one of my relatives who was liberated by the Allies and never returned to Romania. She was sent to Sweden from where she then came to the United States together with her husband Shloimo whom she married in Sweden. Shloimo was also from our region, from a village called Sacel. Shloimo's father had emigrated to the States before the war. When they got here, my aunt and uncle found an old man, living in a cold water flat on the East Side. My aunt and uncle lived with the old man and took care of him. They went to work for a tie manufacturing business. To make the story short, after years of struggle and very hard work they progressed, bought out the

owners than opened a nice store for men, shirts, ties, etc. and bought a house in Boro Park. Unfortunately, they didn't have kids. I don't know what my aunt's experiences were in Auschwitz, she never talked to me about them. But she wasn't ever the same person again. She seemed permanently depressed, wasn't interested in anything. My uncle wanted kids very badly and I could never find out what was wrong with my aunt, why she didn't have or couldn't have kids. All her sisters and brother had kids, the whole family was quite prolific! Anyway, the way I heard it from second hand, against her wishes and only at the insistence of my uncle, they adopted a kid and named him Benczion. He was, I think, nine months old, a pretty blond boy. They had some trouble with him, he was hyperactive or dislexic and wasn't a good student. But he grew up to be a decent kid and a big consolation to his mother after my uncle passed away. Benczi got married and has four boys and a girl.

After Reizi , Raczi and uncle Motti packed their backpacks and left Romania (the ~~same~~ next summer ~~of~~ after our liberation) I never had a chance to see Reizi again. After she got to Israel she married Joel Shmueli, a Sabra, a supervisor at the Post Office in Rehovot. In Israel she changed her name to Shoshana. She had developed some heart problems and at age 56 she collapsed in the doctor's office and couldn't be saved. She left behind two girls: Rachel and Bruria. It always pains me that I didn't get to see Reizi again. We used to correspond while I was still in Romania and after we got to the states she once sent me a nice ring. The ring was too large for my finger, but I wore it anyway, until I finally lost it. By the time we were finally able to visit Israel she was long gone. My granddaughter, Ruti's younger girl is named Yardena Shoshana after her.

Anyway, I will return to the summer of 1945, which as I said found us in Dej with the exception of Suri who stayed behind in order to try and sell off their property in Ruscova. Young people, survivors, used to gather in my uncle Shloimi's house, they played cards a lot and talked even more, about some of their experiences and plans for the future. All intended to

leave Romania and go abroad, mostly to the then Palestine. But some were waiting to sell off their inheritance, some made good business deals and a lot of money, so they procrastinated, some got married, children came and ended up staying.

I was pretty much withdrawn, didn't have any friend my age, read a lot and thought of going back to school in the fall. There really wasn't anything else I wanted to do. I don't mean to brag, but I have always been on the top of my class and my parents had planned for me to attend high school in Sighet when the time came. I could live with my aunt Henia's family. In those days, compulsory schooling was only up to the fourth grade. Few parents or kids dreamt of higher education, they simply couldn't afford it. If a kid showed great potential it was possible to receive a scholarship. So I grew up with the notion of a higher education. Survivors were admitted back to school without much difficulty, but of course, you still needed a place to stay and someone to support you and help you. I don't know how I was going to solve these problems, but I had hoped that I would find a way and I was still in posession of our house at the time.

Unfortunately, for me, it wasn't supposed to or, I should say it wasn't meant to be just then. I came down with a case of pneumonia in a very bad way. I spent some time at the hospital and when I got out I was again very skinny and weak, even walking hurt so— I walked like an old person, a very old person!

My aunts set to the task of fattening me up and succeeded only too well! I recall being fed huge slices of fresh bread topped with butter and honey and countless cups of milk a day. In the meanwhile fall had almost gone, we were still in Dej, my uncle Motti started making good money in selling paints - the real thing - of which there was a shortage after the war - as there was of everything. Motti was about 22 years old. My aunts, Reizi and Raczi kept house, uncle Shloimi lived with us for some time, but I remember him very vaguely only.

Spring of 1946 arrived and my aunts and uncle started talking about leaving Romania. While they were figuring out exactly how to do it and also waiting for Suri who was in Sighet-and also Ruscova- trying to sell their house and land, I was also thinking that I should

try and sell our house and land in Krivei. You see, I had taken it for granted that I would go along with them - my aunt & uncle. When it became clear to me that they wouldn't incumber themself with me, I didn't blame them, I understood that they had a very hard road ahead of them and I wasn't that strong yet, in spite of being fattened up! And since they couldn't wait for Suri to finish the business deal they decided to leave and Suri and I would follow as soon as possible. In the early couple of years after the war ended, the borders were open in all direction, especially to Budapest, there was a lot of smuggling across borders. That is not to say that it wasn't dangerous. One needed a guide to get one over by walking through forests and mountains and how could you make sure that the guide was reliable and wouldn't rob or kill you? There were such instances too!

It was decided that I should go to my aunt and uncle Rifka and Mordechai Pollak, who lived in Targu-Mures. I mentioned earlier that they had not been deported and were an elderly couple - especially viewed through the eyes of a teenager. There wasn't really any other place for me to go. The only other mature relative still alive was my uncle Hersh-Leib - half brother of my father, as was aunt Rifka half-sister - but Hersh-Leib hadn't remarried yet at that time. Aunt Rifka was the second wife of uncle Mordechai and there were no kids except for one daughter from my uncle's first marriage. Aunt Rifka was a beautiful lady, inside and out. She was heavy, but had a kind, smiley face with dark brown eyes, they treated me like a daughter. My uncle Mordechai was a smart man and extremely neat. Once, as I walked ahead of him, he stopped me and said: "Henyele, the seams of your stockings are crooked, you should straighten them out." You have to understand that coming from a religious man this was very unusual. And when I got married to Sruli someone askedhim if I will cut my hair (according to tradition) he answered: "When her husband will wear a beard, she will cut her hair!" My point is, that he wasn't your average Chasid.

By the time I got to Targu-Mures, I was badly overweight, I looked like a little barrel. My aunt confided to me a little later that at first glance , upon my arrival, she thought that I was limping. She was much relieved to see that I wasn't

limping, I was merely overweight!

Targu-Mures was a beautiful city, with a famous university, museums and parks.,It was the seat of the "Autonomous Hungarian Region" of Transylvania since Hungarians were the predominant population. I became friendly with another girl, a distant relative and together we explored the city. Through another distant relative I got access to a private library (whose owner never returned)and I could take out as many books as I wanted and spent too much time reading. I didn't stay very long in Targu-Mures, but it was a nice interlude.

Once, while walking on the stret and looking into a display window of a bookstore I noticed a book with the title "Teach Yourself English!" (translated from Romanian) On impulse I went in and bought the book. I plodded through that book and I am sure I learned something, especially in spelling. I discovered that I liked the language, I think because it seemed to me that I wouldn't have a hard time learning it. But, that was the extent of my learning and didn't pick it up again until many years later. However, one fraze from that book stayed with me until today: "Everything is difficult before it is easy", common wisdom, but so very well put!

In the meantime, my uncle Hersh-Leib remarried and invited me to come live with them. I had mentioned earlier that my uncle had been married and had two children before deportation. They had lived in Sighet and were well off. My uncle had a tannery and a nice house and when he returned from forced labor he went back to his house and his old profession. He had a huge yard where he worked on the hides, the smell of which penetrated the house, it wasn't very pleasant, but for the time being and until he would find another place, it had to be borne.

My uncle married a woman from deep Romania, by the name of Leah. She was a widow and had two boys. The older boy stayed on with some relatives and only the young boy, about a few years old, Maier, stayed with his mother. My aunt Rozsi also ended up coming to stay with us. Hersh-Leib, like his sister Rifka, was also a very gentle, quiet man and in looks resembled a lot to her too. Aunt Leah turned out to be sickly, and Maier a spoiled

brat. But she was nice enough to me. After the war, there were few more mature vomen in our region as this category of women didn't survive and many men were looking for spouses from Romania proper, or Bucovina where there was quite a selection, Botosani, Iasi, etc.

I returned to Sighet sometime in spring 1946. My aunts had left together with Motti, but Suri was left behind, in Sighet. I cannot recall at what point Suri married Iossel Pollak, a guy from Poienile-de-sub Munte, a guy quite a bit older than she was. He was very bright and a great businessman, also well educated in Yeshivot, but for whatever reason Suri took her sweet time accepting him. Anyway, after Rachel was born to them on Cyprus, they had another daughter, Judith, born in Israel, both sisters live at present in Rehovot and have kids of their own. Both girls were bright and got a University education and became high school teachers. Rachel became a lawyer later on.

Sometime that year, uncle Hersh-Leib became my legal guardian and sold our house for me. Now, I had some money and we debated what I should do. My uncle wanted me to learn some trade - and what was the trade in those days that Jewish girls were likely to learn? Seamstress, of course! Unless you came from a rich family! I was adamantly opposed to that idea. I had still not given up on my dream of going back to school. I was seventeen years old and needed quite a bit of tutoring in order to start at some decent level. As it turned out, I had to get a different kind of tutoring, one in Hebrew studies, but I'll return to that later.

It had been now over one year that the war had ended. Russian troops were stationed in Sighet. There was hunger, great lack of goods and services, a lot of blackmarketeering was going on. The "lei", the Romanian currency was hardly worth anything, a certain amount of lawlessness prevailed. Russian soldiers would rob people sometimes, but most of all, they wanted their wrist-watches, they were crazy about wrist-watches, they would stop people and demand "Davai chas"(give me your watch) so that people started calling them "davainiks". A joke made the rounds about the Russian who got hold of a clock, took it to the watchmaker and demanded, at gunpoint, that he make him three wristwatches.

Yet, at the same time, there was a certain frenziness in the

air, a celebration of life afterthat long war, the borderswere still open, survivors came and went. They partied a lot at the Crown Hotel in the center of town, there were many balls, there was a good Gypsy band, playing mostly Hungarian music. It was said (in view of the worthless currency) that survivors sold their parents' and grandparents' fortunes for a pair of "burger shtivel" a type of leather boots in order to dance the malagamba with. (the boots were much in vogue, I think they were the kind worn by Hungarian officers and so was the dance "malagamba" in vogue, a kind of fast fox-trot)

Survivors trew away customs and religion not wanting to believe in a God who let all that happen. It was a rebellion born of desperation and howmuch of the partying was real gayety and how much was a drowning of their sorrows, probably no one could tell.

I didn't belong to the partying groups, besides being too shy, I didn't have any friends among them, they were for the most part older people. Of all my childhood friends no one had returned to the region. Of my age group, only my good friend Malcsi Pollak and another boy survived and of all the people from my village I know of about one dozen. My friend Malcsi and her sister Ghiczu were liberated by the Allies, were sent to Sweden from where they later emigrated to Israel. I can't recall at all how it happened that the two sisters and I made contact, by mail, of course. While I was in Arad, in seminary, we started corresponding, but after they got to Israel I stopped hearing from them directly. My aunt Rozsi used to meet them once in a while and keep me up-to-date of their fate, more or less. It seems that my friend had become a teacher, married a Rabbi and had some ten kids. Her sister Ghiczu - who was a very, very bright girl - married the Sweden chief Rabbi Jacobsen's son, and they have a son involved in Israeli politics, I think his name is Zvi and he uses his mother maiden name, Pollak , when he writes articles.

Why am I bringing all this up? I am trying to answer this question for myself and I am coming up with more than one answer. The obvious one is that it still hurts. We were such good, close friends, all three of us not only Malcsi, and it is such a disappointment! It so happens that a relation of my husband's is also related to them, they knew where I was and could have contacted me.

When Sruli and I visited Israel for the first time I thought of contacting them, got Malcsi's phone number, but never followed through. I figured, they knew where I was. In retrospect, I am sorry I didn't, It was misplaced pride on my part! I think that I am more of a sentimental creature than most, I love to meet people from my old life, from my young adult years, relatives, friends, acquintances, I'll travel long distances to attend their family affairs.

I also think that - strangely enough - I am taking a vicarious pleasure in the knowledge that my friends have done all right! That their kids are learned and successful! To me, it eases the pain a little.

I will return to my life in Sighet, in the summer of 1946, living with my auncle Hersh-leib and Doda Leah. What changed my direction was a letter I had received from my uncle Mordechai in Targu-Mures. He wrote that leaders of the Poalei-Tzeirei Agudath Israel were recruiting young girls of suitable background for the purpose of opening a Beth Yaakov Seminary where girls would train for teachers in Beth Yaakov schools and leaders in kibutzim. In other words, train for "Mora Umadricha" By that time, more and more so called "kibutzim" were opening up and Beth Yaakov schools were also urgently needed.

As youngsters started trickling back, teenagers and even older ones especially girls, had no family, no home and no purpose. With the help of the American Joint mostly, Kibbutzim, schools and orphanages were being established all across Romania. But there were not enough qualified people to staff these institutions since so many professionals had perished.

The "kibbutzim" were called thus because they were supposed to train youngsters, prepare them for life in Palestine, teach them Hebrew and teach them a trade. There were kibbutzim run by different organizations. Agudath Israel had a girls' and boys' kibbutz, Mizrachi, Ichud also had their kibbutzim. The goal was Aliyah, a word that took on such importance as if that had been the most important thing in their lives, something that would solve all their problems and, of course, I too became one of those youngsters later on and Aliyah meant everything to me.

The Agudath Israel Seminary undertook the task of educating girls for positions in these institutions and it had to be achieved in record time. They proposed to put these girls through a crash-course, cramming two years in one year of study.

In my time and place parents didn't put much store in educating girls in Hebrew studies as they did for the boys. We went to public school (there wasn't any other in the village), boys went to cheder every day, but forthe girls there was a different system. We would get a Beth-Yaakov teacher now and then, mostly during our summer vacation, she would teach us for a few weeks and return to wherever she came from. I assume the Community was unable to afford a steady teacher.

I was told by my uncle that being able to read and write Hebrew was the only pre-requisite for acceptance in the Seminary. As my skills in those areas were pretty poor I spent the rest of that summer improving on them. I practiced on my own until I became more or less satisfied that I wouldn't flunk a test.

I past the admission test along with other 23-24 girls (I don't recall exactly). We were all - except for one -survivors of camps and all orphans. To my knowledge, only one of the girls still had a father - Suri Waks, who later became a good friend of mine. The youngest of us was sixteen years old, the only one. Her family hadn't been deported. I was the only seventeen years old the rest of the girls were older, I believe the oldest was about twenty-four.

We started schools in fall of 1946 right after the holidays. The school was established in the city of Arad, in Transylvania, a fairly large city. We had a building for ourselves with dormitories, our own kitchen and cook. We wore black uniforms, buttoned in front that were provided by the school. For straight eight months we barely looked from the books and notebooks, I doubt there ever was a more dedicated classroom of students. We were taught some twelve subjects, Hebrew was taught as a language and all studies were Hebrew studies - I am including contemporary Jewish history in this category. We had a few male teachers and only one lady teacher - an

older girl, a rabbi's daughter, very pretty and nice and we all admired her and liked her a lot.

I was willing to work hard and became very good in most subjects and soon had a group which studied with me. I remember now that I am writing this, that we got a nickname for being so studious, but I can't remember any longer what that was.

Our history teacher was an ardent Zionist. He also had a good voice and wrote poetry. He taught us all the new songs, songs that were popular in kibbutzim about patriotism and Zionism and work in a real kibbutz and about the ships of survivors trying to reach Palestine in spite of the British blockade. In retrospect, it seems to me that our experience at the Seminary was not at all what one would expect from Agudath Israel people, they were not stuffy "chnyaks" at all. There was not one minute lost, we became so involved in our studies that we had to be practically dragged out by our lady teacher inorder to go for a walk once in a while. To make the story short, we had some final exams and received certificates of "Mora Umadricha" with a picture and all the subjects and marks listed. (I believe that was the first picture I made since before deportation.)

A couple of girls had dropped out and twentyone of us graduated. We were assigned jobs in different cities and to different institutions. I got the job at the Agudath Israel kibbutz in Sighet. I was happy, it was familiar teritory.

There hasn't been much written about survivors lives' after the war - at least, to my knowledge. That is the reason that I am venturing past my experiences and memories from childhood and concentration camps even though this will amount to only a glimpse of our lives after the war. (I know I said in thebeginning that I want to bring my storyup to the present and I hope, I will, G-d willing, this will be a shorter version.)

The Agudah kibbutz was a large place located on or near what was called the "Yiddishe Gass" the Jewish street, behind the old synagogue close to the firefighters' station. It had two buildings and a large yard and it housed some eighty to one hundred girls at one point, in a few large dormitories, ages from about three thru

late twentieth. The very young kids were not actually survivors, but kids from Romania proper, most of them had parents, but there was a big famine in the land after the war, a famine that lasted quite a few years. So parents sent away their kids to our kibbutz and to Jewish orphanages where thanks to the American Joint they wouldn't starve. You could say that our kibbutz was a combination kibbutz and orphanage. If there were more places such as ours I am not aware of them.

My job was to teach basic Hebrew, some 'dinim' (basics of religious laws) some history, etc., to the younger kids, the older girls were taught by Mr. Davidovits (whose daughter Leah became later on Sidney's wife and my sister-in-law. In this kibbutz I also met Baby, who became a good friend of mine and also sister-in-law). My other job was that of supervision, assign the daily chores, etc. The food wasn't the greatest, but no one complained. We would receive huge crates of all kind of products from theAmerican Joint: condensed milk, milk powder, egg powder, jams, cacao, also blankets, towels and such. Some of it was sold by the management or bartered for other stuff we needed. Were it not for this help - which all kibutzim received - survivors would have been in a lot more trouble

The place was run by a committee under the direction of Rabbi Wizsnitzer, a nice younger fellow who lived on the kibbutz grounds with his family. I got a small room next to them.

Similar to the girls' kibbutz there was one for the boys in another part of town, but I don't remember there being any small boys. And there was a network of outsiders, mostly married couples, members of the Agudath Israel.

Every Shabbes afternoon the ladies auxiliary would cometo the kibbutz for a "Sicha". It was my duty to prepare a speech - lecture - which would be attended by all the girls and, often, some of the leaders and the boys would be listening in the background. After the 'Sicha' there would be much singing and dancing of the Israeli hora. For Purim we put on a show "The Dybbuk" which was a huge success.

There was a workshop on the premises where girls were taught sewing, mostly of mens' shirts by a very good seamstress named Reizi Schwimmer. However, in reality, we were all marking time, waiting to go on Aliyah.

At this time, in addition to uncle Hersh-Leib, my aunt Suri and her husband Yossel Pollack also lived in Sighet and were members of the Agudah. I used to visit them occasionally, have a good meal and sleep over sometimes. They werealso eager to go on Aliyah.

During my one year in the kibbutz I can recall only one time when a few kids actually went on Aliyah. I can recall only one transport. It took a lot of time and money to organize an Aliyah and everyone was busy talking about the ALIYAH LIST! About how many places each kibbutz had gotten, who would be the lucky ones leaving, etc. It was supposed to be on 'first come, first served' basis, those longest in kibbutz leaving sooner. There were also rumors that some of the places were sold to outsiders, that one could buy a place.

I wasn't expecting to get on thelist yet, as by the time I got to work there, the kibbutz already was in existence for some time. Anyway, Suri and her husband also got places on that Aliyah and, as I had mentioned earlier, spent one year in Cyprus, where Rachel was born.Suri never really recovered after Cyprus, she's been ailing ever since.

As far as my other aunts anduncle are concerned, after two years of wanderings through Europe they reached Palestine, lived thru hard times and all the wars. Raczi -who became Ruthie- married Bubi Fisher - Shafir in Hebrew - he was also from Sighet. H e became an officer in the army, ias now retired with he rank of colonel. I understand he is still working for the Army, in the food supply dept. I met him a few times, both here and in Israel. He is a very nice guy. My aunt Ruthie -who is only 1-2 years older than I- had breast cancer surgery (mastectomy) about twenty years ago. They have a son, Iudah (after my grandfather). He is an Air Traffic Controller at one of the airports and his hobby is flying. she also has a daughter, Orit, who is married and has two kids. Orit works in a Bank and her husband is also employed at the airport as an engineer.

I got to meet my aunt Reizi's two daughters, Ra chel and Bruria a few years after our arrival to the States, while they were on a trip to the U.S with their husbands. Rachel had married a Sabra, I can't recall his name, they have two kids. They have a horse farm - they breed horses, sort of an unusual business for our kind of people! Bruria is married to a building contractor who is in business with his father. Motti married a teacher of English, a Shephardi from Turkey and they have one set of twin daughters and one other daughter, I believe they live in Cholon. All the others I mentioned live in Rehovot. I used to be very close to my aunts while I was growing up and now - with the exception of a newyears card or call , we are not in touch. I keep up with their lives mostly thru my aunt Ruchel from Brooklyn. She keeps in touch with them. My uncle Motti used to work for the Histradut, has long since retired. He had changed his name from Appel to 'Avneri'.

The one event during my year in Kibbutz that stand out is the partition of Palestine, the birth of the Jewish State, of ISRAEL. For survivors like us whose main objective at the time was to make Aliyah, there could be no better news. There was much rejoicing, all kibbutzim in the area marched through the town with the Israeli flags, girls dressed in blue skirts and white blouses, boys in the same colors pantsand shirts. There were speeches by the leaders of thetown and celebrations till late in the night. That was in May 1948.A few months later the Communist Party took a firm grip of the country. They started by nationalizing private property and shortly after, they outlawed all minority and religious schools and, for us, the coup de grace, outlawed kibbutzim. We were given a period of time during which to disperse, I don't recall how long. AS I said, I had been in the kibbutz for just about one year.

That was a sad, heartbreaking time, the dissolution of the kibbutz. The young kids, those who still had parents went back to them, others went to orphanages which were still allowed to exist. The older girls looked for jobs or got married - to guys much older than themselves, those who were able to make a living, longstanding friendships were broken up. Most of them I had never met or even heard of again.

The Agudah leaders secured a job for me at a Jewish orphanage in a city in Transylvania called Simleul-Silvaniei (in Romanian or Szilagysomlyo in Hungarian). I was supposed to be a supervisor, in reality I was teaching the young kids Jewish subjects, as I did in Sighet. A job was also provided for a friend of mine, Ghittu or Kathy Stern, I don't recall in what capacity. I think it was thru Ghittu that I originally met Sruli Fogel (Stern) my future husband and Ghittu's first cousin (or half-cousin). Sruli was born on January 2nd, 1929, he was three months older than I was. He had been deported along with his mother whose name was Sura-Leah Fogel, hisbrother Sidney and sister Slova. Sruli's father, Iosef-Mordechai had passed away earlier under some mysterious circumstances, I was never able to find out what actually happened to him. Sruli's older brother Herczi had married even before the Hungarians occupied Transylvania and lived in Deva, Romanian teritory and wasn't deported. Another brother, Urtza, or Aaron, was drafted to forced labor, survived, married my friend Baby while she was in kibbutz and early on emigrated to Israel. Slova survived, married Hershel Genuth and they settled in Viseul de Sus from where they eventually went to Israel. So, Sruli and his siblings were lucky in a way, they all survived.

Sruli had been in Auschwitz originally and from there he was sent to Buchenwald. He was sick of Typhus and lost most of his hair and only little ǧew back. After liberation Sruli went to live with his brother in Deva where he went back to school. At some point he came back to Sighet and went to stay in the kibbutz Ichud during which time I met him, but we didn't get close until years later. Anyway, Ghittu and I worked in that orphanage for a few months and one useful thing I got out of this job was a typing course Ghittu and I had taken on a whim from a former nun. One couldn't be a nun either under the Communists!

After a while, we found out that there existed an ilegal kibbutz in Bucharest, it was said that there was still a good chance to make Aliyah. I don't recall what Ghittu did, but I went to Bucharest. There I found a number of girls, survivors, living in a private house and being taken care, supposedly, by Agudah members. However, nothing materialized and within a short time funds ran out and

the whole thing fell apart. I can't help thinking that there probably never was a real chance to go on Aliyah, that our "caretakers" were just using us to collect money from some sources, that it was simply a scheme.

While in Bucharest I had discovered a distant relation, one Mendel Gancz and his wife and little boy. I stayed with them for a couple of months, they were very kind to me. He was a furrier and made good money. In those days you couldn't buy them readymade, in the stores. He used to get thousands of lei for a coat, but they spent the money even faster than he made the coats. After I left Bucharest, I have never heard from them or about them again.

I made a friend in Bucharest, a girl from Salistea de Sus, the same place Sruli was from, her name was Eva Appel (no relation), I don't recall the circumstances of our meeting, she probably was in the same so-called Kibbutz I was and neither of us knew what to do. We decided to stay for a while, it was summer, she had some help from a married sister and I had acquired a few kids whose parents wanted them to learn a little Hebrew and so made some pocket money. It was 1949, I was twenty years old, Eva was one or two years older. We explored Bucharest, the famous "Cismigiu" park, the outdoor market similar to the one on Orchard street on the East Side in New York, we went to the movies and there I saw my first Opera show. Eva was a pretty girl, she had a boyfriend whom she married eventually. I didn't have a boyfriend, but had a few friends, boys and girls, we had our little circle. I was still overweight and thought of myself as "almost ugly!"

While I was away from Sighet, a great-aunt of mine - my grandmother Rachel's sister Leah had come to live in Sighet. I called her Doda Leah. She and her husband and two kids - Ruchele and Hershy- had lived in Romania , somewhere in Bucovina at the time of deportations. Romania didn't deport their Jews, but were Hitler's allies and Jews suffered plenty there too, in some parts of the country more than in others. Whole segments of the population had been uprooted and placed in an area called Transnistria, where they lived in ghettos, were forced to do all

kind ofheavy work. There was much hunger and sickness and died by the thousands. My aunt's family was also deported to Transnistriaand her husband perished there. Forced by hunger, my aunt sent away Hershy -not yet a teenager- to a Jewish family in another area from which Jews hadn't been moved. This family was well-off and didn't have kids. This is a sad story.

This family came to like Hershy very much, treated him like their own son, even talked of adopting him to which my aunt would never agree.

when the war ended, this family was reluctant to let the boy go back to his mother. By that time he was about 14-15 years old, they wanted to educate him, something his mother could have ill afforded.

For the sake of the child, my aunt let him stay on, she went to visit when she could. I met Hershy once - after I had returned to Sighet from Bucharest- when he came to visit his mother during a summer vacation. He was a very handsome kid, with nice manners, very bright. To make the story short, Hershy eventually emigrated To Israel and did reunite with his mother. But about age 21-22 he was hit by a car while crossing the street. They had such a short time together, my aunt and her son, it was another terrible tragedy,another terrible loss!

Ruchele, my aunt's daughter had gone on one of the very early childrens' Aliyah. She married well and by the time my aunt got to Israel she found herself a grandmother of three boys and one daughter. On our first visit to Israel, Bubi had taken us to Bnei Brak to see my aunt and that occasion Ruchele and her 12 year old daughter also came over. My aunt's husband had passed away by that time. We took some pictures and that was the last time I saw her. But, at least I know that my aunt had some 'nachas' in her later years.

While in Bucharest, I started receiving latters from my aunt asking me to return and live with her. She was probably afraid for me, living in a large sinful city! She was right, in the sense that there was no purpose in my staying any longer. So I went back to Sighet.

I had never before met Doda Leah or perhaps I did , just didn't remember it. She was a lady of about 40-45 years old with a pretty face, but heavy hips and legs. She was an astute businesswoman and made a living from blackmarketeering. There was still a great lack of goods, of food and everything else. Doda Leah made connections with farmers, for example, come home with a large valise of packaged butter and resell it to pre-approved customers. Sugar was scarce so she would bring honey, etc. It was very dangerous,but there wasn't much choice. There weren't many employment opportunities either.

When I returned to Sighet, my uncle Hersh-Leib and aunt Rozsi were still there, but aunt Fritzi had gotten maried to a widower, one Gancz Duvid whose wife and children died in Aushwitz. They settled in Satu-Mare (Satmar) and had one boy named Favish. (After my grandfather Gancz). I had visited them once or twice, they had a beautiful house, aunt Fritzi was a 'balabusta' and I always had a good time there. Duvid dealt in lumber, there was a huge lumberyard in the back of the house. While I was still in Sighet in Kibbutz, my friend from the Seminary, Suri Waks, came to see me. She told me that with a few boys and girls she is planning to leave Romania and wanted to know if I would join them. By that time it had become quite dangerous to cross the borders and all kind of stories were floating around about robberies and killings by smugglers.

One way of crossing the borders was somewhere in the Satu-Mare region - I am talking about a border with Hungary -. I also needed some money. When I went to Satu-Mare to talk this over with my aunt and uncle, they advised me strongly against taking such chances, rather frightened me off. Shortly after, when the Communists nationalized private enterprises they took over my uncle's home and lumberyard and they moved to another location. On the last Aliyah leaving Romania, my aunt and uncle left too. I had regretted my decision - not joining my friend - because she and her group did cross the border without trouble and arrived eventually to Israel. We corresponded for a while than she stopped answering my letters. In her last letter she complained bitterly that her father is forcing her to marry someone she doesn't want, that she is in love with someone else. I had tried repeatedly to find out what happened to her(through some people from Viseul de Sus now living in Israel) but without result. Then the Iron Curtain descended firmly on the country and it would take me almost twenty years before I would be able to emigrate. Twenty years in Communist Romania at twenty years of age and looking for a way to support myself, not to become a burden on any relative.

My aunt Leah was very good to me, more like a mother than an aunt. She tried to teach me cooking and baking and tried to marry me off. There were very few Jewish boys still there in Sighet and besides I had decided that I want to get married in Israel! I hadn't yet realized what Communism meant, not exactly. In Sighet I met again my old friend Ghittu Stern. She was working for the "Sfatul Popular', the new name for a Town Hall..

I started looking for a job, I couldn't live off my aunt indefinitely. There were few jobs available in general and for a girl like me with no particular skills, there were even less. Some of the girls worked in the only factory in town, a sweater factory, at the machines or other work. There was an employment office - all job applications had to be filed at this one office - so I went there and filed an application for office work, listing typing as one of my qualifications.

I hadn't done any typing since I took that course from the

former nun and I was worse than bad at it, but I got lucky. The employment office was run by a Jewish guy, himself a survivor and I guess, he took pity on me because he even didn't test me. The Tribunal (Court) needed a typist and he sent me over to try for the job. I was tested there and was hired on the spot. What they were looking for was not so much for a fast typist, but someone who could spell correctly, they figured the speed would come later. There was a lower Court called "Judecatorie", the Tribunal was the highest Court in the region.

My job was to type up the "Decisions" (that's what they called the sentences rendered by the judges). The judge would write them up by hand and I would have to copy them. So not only spelling was important, but I had to be a little bit familiar with legal terms, the vocabulary too. I think that the extensive reading I did all my life helped me in this area too. None of the judges new how to type, there were no typewriters on their desks. There were about 6-7 judges and I had to learn to decypher the various handwritings. The salary wasn't much, but I didn't pay rent, my aunt didn't take a penny from me, after all.

In those days the courts of law were extremely busy. The Communists put thee squeeze on the farmers, especially the prosperous ones,(the kulaks) obligated them to deliver a large percentage of their produce to the State, that is, a quota system. If they didn't deliver the required quota, or found that they have hidden some produce they were charged with sabotage, tried and always imprisoned. There were hundreds of cases of sabotage, cases of theft from the state owned businesses by managers or workers, cases of blackmarketeering and for all of these cases the usual punishment was imprisonment for long months or years. Then they used these prisoners to build canals reclaiming swamps, in mines, on roads, etc., and they died by the thousands.

Then the process of'collectivization' started and the 'kulaks' were imprisoned without even being charged with any offense, their property taken away including their family home in some cases (moving the family to poorer quarters). The poorer a peasant was the better chance he had to get some good position, become a Party

member and the sky was the limit!

Thus it happened that half illiterate people became the managers of the state owned stores, functionaries in offices, militia (policemen), etc. Inefficiency, stupidity, cruelty ruled! (Is it any wonder that today the whole structure of communism has just about collapsed!) Such were the times when I started working as a lowly little clerk and had a chance to see communist justice from up-close.

We worked six days a week Monday-Saturday, eight hours a day with half hour off for lunch. That was the first time that I had to work on Shabbes and it was a hard pill to swallow. There were very few people who could avoid it, sooner or later everybody had to, if one wanted to survive.

Ghittu and I decided to go to night school in order to qualify for a high school degree, sooner or later. And we started participating in the meager Jewish life available to young people. That consisted of a singing in a chorus, some dancing and not much else.

I had become a very fast typist within a short period of time. So much so, that I was asked occasionally to sit in at trials in order to relieve the 'grefier' (what we call here the stenographer.) Over there the 'grefier' was of higher status. He did the swearing in of defendents, witnesses, etc., took the minutes of the proceedings, etc. But my sit-ins happened only on Saturdays, when only light, civil cases were scheduled.

We had reached the year 1950, the Iron Curtain couldn't be moved one iota, there was no talk of emigration whatsoever. Then an incredible event came to pass, a truly dramatic happening.

It was Yom Kipur morning, we were all gathered in the Shul when a rumor started spreading like wildfire. It was said that application forms for immigration to Israel were being distributed at the Police station!

What anti-Semites! They had to pick exactly the day of

Yom Kipur to distribute those forms! Nevertheless, in no time the Shul had emptied and long lines were forming in front of the Police station. People were competing the applications on the spot and handing them in.

After handing out a certain amount of applications the word came that there were no more, they had ran out of them, new ones would be coming at a later date. (It would take another few years before new applications were issued).

I was among those -the majority- who left empty-handed, but Doda Leah had gotten her form. I think it was in 1951 that the first approval of passports had started to trickle in. The joy of receiving a passport cannot be described. Each time a family left, the whole town, Jews and a lot of non-Jews would go out to the train station to see them off.

Among the first ones to receive a passport was my Doda Leah. A passport was usually valid for a couple of months. A family could take along about 80 kg.personal and household effects for one adult, half that for a child. Things had to be packed in wooden crates of certain dimensions and shipped to customs to Bucharest or Constanta - the port city -where they would be thoroughly checked. Nothing of value could leave the country. No jewelry -except the wedding band-nothing of gold, silver, art objects, paintings, expensive rugs, etc., the list was endless.

People sold their belongings for whatever they could get. Then bought sets of dinnerware of cheap porcelain, dishes, clothing, and most importantly, bedding. Quilts with goose down as if they were going to Siberia, sets of quilt covers, sheets, towels and almost everything had to be handcrafted since there wasn't yet much ready made stuff available in stores. The crates filled up quickly, all posessions accumulated during the years after the war packed in a crate or two per family to start yet again on another journey. But this time there was also hope for something better, infinitely better; to live in freedom in our own land.

With Doda Leah gone, life for me changed drastically and not for the better. First there was the emotional impact. She had represented for me the past -a fragment of it- she acted and talked and dressed and looked like most of the women of my village, with the warmth and kindness of a mother. She reminded me of the more joyous aspects of village life when parties meant getting together a group of women to help in various chores, mostly in preparation for winter. Like the making of 'sauerkraut' when every leaf of cabbage was checked for worms and impurities then shreded and placed in barrels to ferment with salt and I don't know what else and leaving some whole leaves in it too for the making of stuffed cabbage. Or the shuking of corn in fall, or during the long nights in winter when women, girls would gather to 'flicken feidern'riping off the soft sides of the goose feathers in order to make bed coverings and pillows and quilts which were so important in our kind of weather and also constituted a part of a girl's dowry. These events were called "Klakka's", refreshments would be served and a lot of storytelling and bantering would go on to which we children loved to listen to. There were some real parties too. I can remember a Purim party at the Shochet's house, the first one I was allowed to attend at night. I even remember some of the words the Shochet sang making good-natured fun of the people. He sang in ryme in Yiddish: "Oilem, goilem shteit un hert, Shokelt mit dem kop azoi vi a ferd, Tsuhaia" (People, fools stand and listen and nod their heads like horses) and people would repeat their own enthusiastic "tsuhaia" at the end of each verse. And a party for kids was the making of the prune lekvar in the fall in the backyard in huge cauldrons, over a fire, the prunes mixed with sugar would bubble for hours and hours and we kids would stand around and wait for an opportunity when the man specially hired to mix the lekvar would let us dip a long wooden spoon we could then lick.

When I think back of my generation of kids in those days I cannot believe how naive and innocent they were, how little they needed to bring them pleasure. And with the knowledge of today, my heart breaks when I think of the incredible hardships and struggles the adults had to go through just to survive day by day, always in fear of some new rule against them or the rise of a new

Haman. But even this little was too much and had to be taken away from them, life itself had to be taken away from them.

I don't mean to say that they were angels, none of us are. We all have miriad faults, shortcomings, vices and prejudices. I don't believe that there is anything absolutely, wholly, totally good, perhaps somewhere, sometime 'wholly good' does exist, but I do know for sure that 'wholly' evil does exist. Only how bright the spark of humanity shines in each of us makes a difference and there wasn't even a twinkle of it throughout the Jewish tragedy we call the Holocaust.

CREMER MARTIN (Mordechai Eliezer)
1905 - 1942-3?

I am the third from the left, sitting down.

Rabbi Wizsnitzer holding his baby. Itzik Fucks at the other end. I am in the middle above the kids holding the placard that says "Caminul de copii, Agudath Israel, Sighet."

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